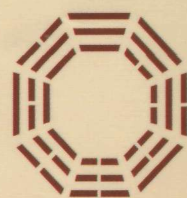
Ba Gua

Hidden Knowledge in the Taoist Internal Martial Art



John Bracy

Liu Xing-Han

1-55643-276-3 Martial Arts

"Authentic, well-ordered and written, Bracy and Liu's *Ba Gua* should fill a void. There is almost no literature on Ba Gua in English."

—Robert Smith, author, *Chinese Boxing: Masters and Methods*



The Taoist yogic discipline of Ba Gua is an internal form of the ancient art of kung fu—as are the much older t'ai chi and Xing I. Ba Gua is the most arcane and yogic of these three sister arts, distinguished by serpentine turning and circling movements and its own internal energy exercises, Ba Gua Qi Gong. As more people study t'ai chi and Qi Gong, major interest has focused on the techniques of Ba Gua for keeping the joints loose and enhancing deep breathing.

Ba Gua's founder was Dong Hai-Chuan, a late 19th Century imperial body guard who became a famous master during the waning years of the last Chinese Dynasty. In this history and instructional guide, John Bracy and Liu Xing-Han, the oldest living master of Ba Gua, describe Ba Gua's relationship to the *I Ching* and how Taoist yoga came to be connected to the martial arts.

Used for the last century in China as a physical practice for "opening the joints" and nourishing *qi,* Ba Gua has become popular in the West as an alternative health and meditative practice. Bracy and Liu probe especially the connection between *qi* training and superior martial arts ability, showing how late nineteenth century esoteric intellectual currents merged with the martial arts of the Boxer Rebellion. This information lends depth and texture to the description of technical training moves and postures. More than a hundred photos help the student of Ba Gua observe correct and incorrect postures. Especially valuable is the primer on "Walking the Circle," the most fundamental exercise in Ba Gua.



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Ba Gua

Hidden Knowledge in the Taoist Internal Martial Art

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North Atlantic Books
Berkeley, California

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卜瑞喜

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Most of the two-man drills and self-defense application photos in chapters 4 and 5 were photographed by Bijan Yashar.

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First and foremost I wish to thank all the internal martial arts masters who have patiently instructed me in and entrusted me with their arts. In particular I wish to thank Master Liu Xing-Han, coauthor of this book, who accepted me as an "inner door" initiate in the Ba Gua Zhang disciple lineage. My training with Master Liu would have been fruitless without the foundation laid by my other internal teachers, particularly the late Chang Shr-Jung and Masters Ho Shen-Ting, Yi Te-Kuen, and Yi Tien-Wen of Taiwan. To these teachers and the many others who have graciously assisted me in my study of the martial arts I offer my deepest and most sincere thanks.

I graciously acknowledge the help of those who assisted me in this work and made this book possible. This reference could not have been possible without the editorial assistance of Bianca Bagatourian, Chris Johnson, clint Johns, and Brent Werner; the research assistance of Eric Gulbrandson and Brian LoBue; the technical assistance of Mike Stone; and the comments and technical advice of my kung fu uncles, brothers, and sisters in Beijing. To the aforementioned and everyone who provided moral and technical support I extend my sincerest thanks.

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About the authorship

With the exception of Chapter Two and the Conclusion which were written exclusively by John Bracy, *Ba Gua: Hidden Knowledge in the Taoist Martial Art* is a collaboration by both authors.

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Preface

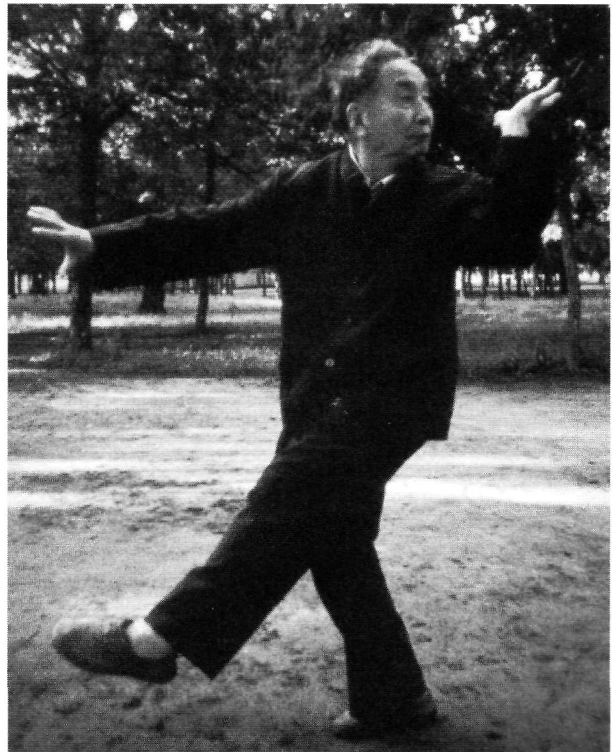
Note on the arrangement of Chinese surnames

The Oriental system for indicating the family name is opposite that of the Occidental; while in the West it appears at the end of a person's name, as in John *Smith,* in the Eastern way it is traditionally indicated first, as in *Yang* Cheng-Fu.

On romanization and pronunciation of Chinese

There are two widely used ways to romanize Chinese. The Wade-Giles system was used extensively before mainland China opened up to the outside world about 1976.[1] An example of pronunciation in this system involves the apostrophe after the letter combination "ch" (ch'), as in *"ch'uan"* for "fist" or "boxing" pronounced with an English style "ch" sound. Without the apostrophe, the sound is pronounced as an English "j." Written "pe" is pronounced "be," and a written "k" without an apostrophe is pronounced as English "j." To illustrate, *Peking* (note no apostrophe) should be pronounced "Beijing."

The *Pin-yin* system developed in mainland China more closely assimilates English pronunciation. In the case of *Beijing,* the written representation of the character is closer to the actual pronunciation. I lowever, the *Pin-yin* system challenges English speakers in other ways. For example, the Wade-Giles written *"ch'i"* looks much like it should be pronounced, corn-pared to the *Pin-yin* *Yin* " written form of the same word.



Master Liu Xing-Han practicing Ba Gua at Temple of Heaven Park, Beijing, 1988.

For the convenience of the reader, this book uses both systems, with preference being given to the most common or familiar spelling. Compare some Wade-Giles representations to that of the *Pin-yin.* Those indicated in bold are the versions used in the present work.

WADE-GILES	PIN-YIN
Peking	**Beijing**
T'ai chi	**Taiji** (the philosophical concept)
T'ai chi ch'uan (the martial art)	Taijiquan
Pa kua	Ba Gua
Hsing **I**	**Xing yi**
Ch'i (written in this text as chi)	Qi*
Tao	Dao
Taoism	Daoism
Kung fu	Gong fu

*Except where appearing in the *ching-chi-shen* alchemical model, or as used in quotations from other sources

Note on abbreviation of terms:

Due to its frequent use, "Ba Gua Zhang" (martial art) is often identified as "Ba Gua." Where the philosophical concept and talisman Ba Gua is referenced, the context will be indicated.

Introductory note

Dawn in Beijing, China. Anyone walking through one of the many lush and immense parks of this ancient capital will inevitably pass by groups of mostly older Chinese men and women practicing their nation's ancient martial traditions. For most of these groups the sunrise ritual centers around slow-moving "soft style" exercise. They are practicing t'ai chi ch'uan, Ba Gua, and related styles of the internal martial arts.

Today, as has been done for over a century, dedicated groups of Ba Gua students and masters gather to practice their art. The best time to meet has always been the same, the predawn. Since the early 1900s, the favorite place of many to perfect their art has been within the walls of the Temple of Heaven in south central Beijing. Scrape the dirt in the right places and you will find bricks placed there by some past master as instructional aids to assist his students in the proper foot positioning of the art.

At almost ninety years of age, Liu Xing-Han may be the oldest and most senior Ba Gua master alive. His apprenticeship in the art began in 1917 when, at the tender age of seven, his father began instructing him in the fundamentals of the art. His training intensified when, on the Chinese New Year in 1924, his father asked that his son be accepted as an "inner door" initiate of the renowned third-generation disciple Master Liu Bin. The master agreed and Liu Xing-Han began a rigorous course of study and dedication that was to last a lifetime. Ultimately he was designated as fourth-generation "inheritor" and charged with maintaining the extensive oral and written records of the clan and with it the responsibility of passing on the information to the next generation. What follows is his story.

劉興漢

Liu Xing-Han

Introduction
by Master Liu Xing-Han

The internal styles of traditional Chinese kung fu, the *net chia ch 'uan,* are the more rare and mysterious of the martial arts and, when fully developed, extremely powerful and effective.[2] These are the styles of Ba Gua (Pa Kua) Zhang, Xing Yi (hsing I) Quan, and t'ai chi ch'uan.

内家拳
nei chia ch'uan

In my youth, when I first began to study martial arts, I thought their purpose was only physical exercise and self-defense. My Ba Gua companions and I often played games to see who could remember more and we continuously tried to outperform each other. It was exciting to dodge, twist, and turn to counter each other's attacks. Years later I would begin to realize the great depth of the art. I discovered that Ba Gua is a far deeper subject than I thought was possible when I studied it as a child.

八卦掌
Ba gua (Pa Kuo) Zhang

I learned that at the heart of Ba Gua was the / *Ching;* the great and ancient oracle, book of wisdom, and most important philosophical work. The / *Ching* is the study of change. It codifies the principle of change through analysis of the lifeblood of the universe: the primal opposing forces of creation and bipolar opposites of yin and yang. According to ancient sages, life, which is change, results from union of the tiger of *yin,* the feminine and receptive force which rises to meet the descending dragon of yang, the male and creative force. The interplay of the tiger Yin and the dragon Yang brings about life, change and birth. This is the essence of the philosophy of Ba Gua. After many years I understood that the martial art of the Ba Gua palm, like the philosophy it is derived from, is adaptation, extension of power, and constant change; because of these it is able to continually meet and adapt to any circumstance. According to the ancient Chinese Taoists, "reality" or "truth" is never frozen or crystallized, but fluid. In the same way that the trigrams of the *I Ching* do not represent truth as a fixed point but as the observation of harmony with change, the Ba Gua martial art reflects its philosophical roots via its constant flow of movements.

太極拳
t'ai chi ch'uan



Bust of Dong Hai-Chuan, founder of Ba Gua Zhang, on display in his hometown, Chu ChiaWu.Wen An County, Hebei.

Harmony and change is the key to understanding the deepest secrets of the internal martial art of Ba Gua.

The famous master Dong Hai-Chuan of the Ching Dynasty, who lived from 1798 to 1879, developed the art of Ba Gua Zhang. He was an imperial bodyguard during the waning years of the last Chinese dynasty whose skill in martial arts encompassed the highest mysteries. Master Dong was respected far and wide not only as a martial artist of the highest order, but also for his knowledge of character and human nature.

The art he founded was like nothing ever seen before in human history. The style was based on effecting turns and circles while utilizing unique training patterns and special walking methods. In practicing his martial arts, Master Dong moved like a coiling dragon riding the wind. When attacked, he moved with evasive and masterful movements as he turned and "changed." No one could match him. He became a legend in his own time.

董海

Dong Hai-Chuan



One of Dong's students, Ch'uan Kai-Ting, drew this portrait after his death.

When Dong was young he traveled throughout China studying from every great master he could find. He was bright and clever, and became proficient in many styles. He especially loved to study with the mountain-dwelling Taoists, and it is said that there was one in particular, forever to remain anonymous, who imparted to him the greatest secrets of the art.

Eventually his travels took him to Beijing where he became employed as a servant in the Forbidden City. One day while serving libations in a yard overcrowded with guests, his great skill in movement became apparent to

everyone present as he moved effortlessly through the crowd and Dong was asked to demonstrate his kung fu. His performance, the first public demonstration of Ba Gua Zhang, dazzled the royal audience. The Emperor, realizing the high level of Dong's skill, instantaneously appointed him to the position of palace bodyguard and martial art instructor.[3]

Dong then began his career as a martial art instructor. He became famous in Beijing, eventually teaching his art to over a hundred students. Ultimately, five were accepted as "inner door" disciples and received the full body of the material.[4] From these first five students the art developed its five principle variations and the body of knowledge spread gradually throughout the globe.

Of Dong's students, the most popular was Cheng Ting-Hwa of Beijing, an operator of an eyeglass shop by profession and a Chinese wrestler by hobby.

程庭華
Cheng Ting-Hwa



This photo taken in 1917, includes third and fourth generation students. Liu Xing-Han's teacher, Liu Bin, is middle row, left of center (with beard).

He became a famous and respected teacher of the art and passed it on to others, thus creating the "Cheng style." Cheng's skill was great and he was given the nickname "Invincible Cobra Cheng." He died in 1900.

There are several stories about Cheng Ting-Hwa's death. A popular version says that he confronted a group of German soldiers who were trying to force him and other Chinese at gunpoint to become part of a work party. As the story goes, he took two knives and charged into the assembled invaders of his country, coiling, turning, and twisting into their midst, killing several of them before he himself was killed.

劉 斌
Master Liu Bin

Master Liu Bin, one of Cheng's top disciples, was my *Shrfu* ("father-teacher"). He was a philosopher and researcher of the most deep, secret, and fascinating aspects of the art. He was skilled in weaving Taoist yoga, astrology,



A Beijing teahouse circa 1900.

and the I Ching into the art. Aided by the assistance of his kung fu "brothers" who supported him so that he wouldn't have to worry about making a living, he concentrated entirely on learning and preserving the art.[1]

I began Ba Gua study with Master Liu Bin in 1917 at the age of seven. The art I was taught is formally called "coiling (or swimming), body exercising eight trigram palm." I studied every day for many years. Until 1937 we studied openly, but when the Japanese occupied Beijing and martial art practice was prohibited by the occupying forces, my brothers and I continued our studies in secret.

八卦連環掌

Body Exercising Eight Trigram Palm

入門弟子

rii men di



Liu Bin (center with beard) shown with senior disciples, Beijing, circa 1917.

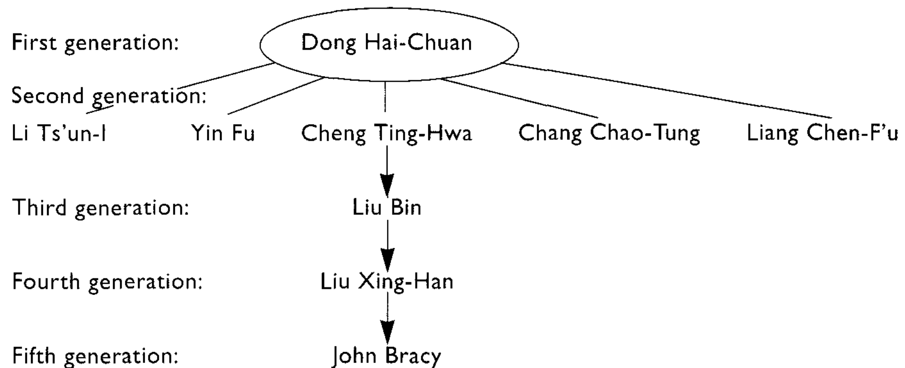
Prior to the Japanese invasion, Beijing was more than the birthplace of the art, it was the center of Ba Gua and people came from all over the country to meet and practice with Beijingers. At that time Ba Gua groups within the city were divided into what was called "North City" Ba Gua and our group, "South City" Ba Gua. I met many good stylists in those years. I remember the well-liked and famous Sun Lu-Tang coming to practice and talk with my teacher and senior brothers. He was a good friend and of the same lineage as my teacher Liu Bin. Although I was quite young, I will never forget him telling me to practice hard and listen carefully to everything my master told me. In the Temple of Heaven Park I learned at the same spot as teachers before me. Cheng, Liu, and Sun Lu-Tang taught in that very park during the apex of Chinese martial arts in Beijing. I studied hard, learned every aspect of the system, and wrote down everything that I learned. I became a formally accepted inner door lineage holder *(ru men di)* in 1925.

The author Liu (at left) with Ba Gua "brothers" in 1933.



Until the late 1930s Beijing was more than

the center of Ba Gua, it was the cultural and artistic center of all China. A dark time for Beijing and the martial arts was the Japanese occupation (1937-1945) since the occupation forces forbade practice during this period. The Cultural Revolution (1967-1976) was a second difficult time when it was impossible to teach openly. After 1976 I returned to the place where I had previously studied, near the south wall of the Temple of Heaven. I have been teaching there and in the park itself ever since. I have accepted more than 100 formal students in my teaching career, but only one foreigner: Mr. John Bracy. He had a good background in the art before studying with me and he was easy to teach. He proved to be extremely hardworking and totally dedicated to the art. In 1988 I accepted him as a formal disciple and gave him the fifth-generation name of Yung Wei.[6]



Once Mr. Bracy touches the material he understands it. He is introducing this style in America through the Hsing Chen Martial Art School in California. His study expands to research in healing, meditation, philosophy, and combat skills and methods of the art. His present work is the writing down of what he has researched. He has accepted several formal inner door students of his own. Sixth-generation disciples under Mr. Bracy include Eric Gulbrandson, Don Quach, Chris Gulbrandson, Carlos Casados, and most recently Dave Phelps. All of these students have been personally approved by me and all initiation ceremonies, with the exception of Carlos Casados's, took place in Beijing in the presence of myself and other senior masters.

At the highest level, development and movement become a mystical experience. Although this concept seems difficult to the novice, the gate to the mystery is really very simple. Through persistent practice of both inner and outer work, the mystery reveals itself.

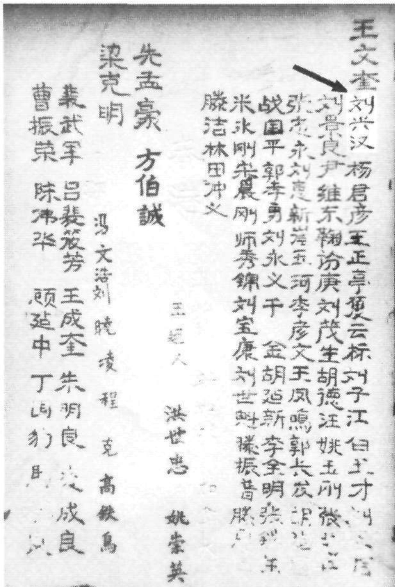
Persist with study, and revelation will come in a flash and you will begin to understand. Your practice will become deep, far ahead of those who practice on a shallow level. Consider the riddles of practice: move forward and withdraw; link mind and body; practice the method of constant change.



Beijing Ba Gua teachers and friends attending John Bracy's lineage ceremony, Beijing, 1988. Some prominent Beijing Ba Gua masters shown in photo are, front row left to right: Dr. Hu Pu-Ren,Wang Rong-Tang, author Liu Xing-Han, Lyang Ke-Quan,and in second row, far right Li Zhong-Quan.

Always remember "one dong/one jing" (one move/one stillness). For every move there is an advance and a withdrawal and a change from movement to stillness. Be clear and precise, don't become confused, and practice consistently. Eventually practice will integrate into your daily life. Merge yin and yang, the dragon and the tiger. Remember always one "move," one "calmness."

Liu Xing-Han
Beijing, China



Stele from side of Dong Hai-Chuan's tomb outside of Beijing. Arrow indicates author Liu's name carved into the plate with other fourth-generation disciples.

賀普仁
Hu Pu-Ren

王榮堂
Wang Rong-Tang

劉興漢
L*a *Xing-Han*

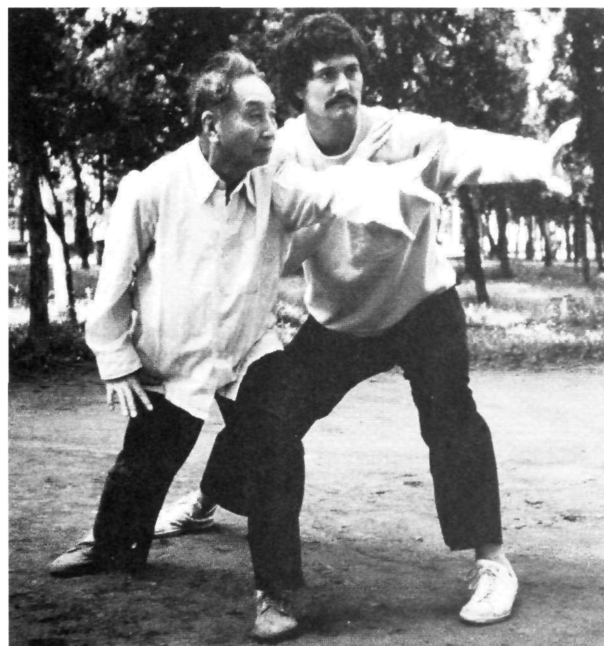
梁克權
Lyang Ke-Quan

李宗權
Li Zhong-Quan

Introduction

by John Bracy

As I look back I realize that for me interest in the internal began before my start in the martial arts in 1967. My Catholic upbringing, which ingrained the notion of the power in the unseen played a role. My father had an influence as well. I will never forget our walks to an empty church and his suggestion that I "feel the quiet." From my earliest days in the martial arts I annoyed my teachers with my strange and weird questions about internal energy and *qi*. Things would only begin to become a little clearer over a decade later. In 1981, while living in Taiwan, I was introduced to the classical internal styles of Ba Gua (Pa Kua), Xing Yi (hsing I) and t'ai chi ch'uan by the late Master Chang Shr-Jung, and Ho Shen-Ting, and the internal family style of Masters Yi Te-Kuen and his son Yi Tien-Wen. As soon as I began to work with these internal styles, I knew that I had found my path. When I traveled to Beijing to advance my studies, I was greatly honored to meet Liu Xing-Han and his students, who immediately accepted me as one of the family. Later I was especially honored when, through a formal Confucian ceremony, I was conferred with formal lineage discipleship of the art.



Authors Liu and Bracy shown practicing Ba Gua Zhang in Beijing, 1988.

張世榮
Chang Shr-Jung

賀順定
Ho Shen-Ting

易德坤
Yi Te-Kuen

易天文
Yi lien-Wen

劉興漢
Liu Xing-Han

The present work is dedicated to assisting those teachers and serious students of Ba Gua and other internal arts who are looking for rare and hidden knowledge of Ba Gua and other internal pugilistic forms. It is my hope that this book will assist with their research and the evolution of the art.

This text brings together several areas of esoteric Ba Gua martial art previously unpublished. Chapter one introduces the political and philosophical

background from which the martial art sprang forth. Chapter Two is concerned with the difficult matter of defining the core of internal art: *qi,* and the nature and meaning of inner power. Chapter Three addresses metaphysical and symbolic aspects of Ba Gua practice. Much of this information is based upon the oral and written instructions passed down to my teacher, eighty-nine-year-old Liu Xing-Han. These lineage instructions are important keys to secret principles and rules of applying the genuine essence of Ba Gua to real combat. Chapter Four documents a specific *qi* and power-training exercise. Chapter Five illustrates two person training exercises that heighten sensitivity and reaction for the development of Ba Gua combat skills. Chapter Six addresses combat applications of Ba Gua. The book brings together material that is rarely discussed, difficult to find, not the form and standard information readily available in other books. It is meant to guide the martial art enthusiast through an in-depth exploration of this rare and beautiful internal art. Furthermore, it is my hope that it will augment the library of internal martial artists of all styles.

The internal martial arts offer a rich and challenging vehicle for personal development beyond fighting skills. They are valuable for mental and spiritual development and with their requirement for body, mind, and spirit harmony, the internal arts are ways to tap human potential that transcend ordinary sports. It is a challenge and a puzzle. To those fellow seekers involved in exploring this great puzzle, I humbly offer this work.

John Bracy
Costa Mesa, California

CHAPTER ONE

The Tao of Ba *Gua*

Ba Gua Zhang, designed to defend simultaneously against multiple opponents, is the only martial art specifically developed for bodyguards. After executing an evasive movement from one attacker, the artist-defender immediately circles, coils, and changes to respond to a second or third aggressor coming from the opposite direction; he doesn't stop there, but immediately turns back and proceeds to counterattack against the original attacker. The Ba Gua practitioner, fluid and powerful when under attack, moves like a whirling dervish—continuously maneuvering in quick arcing and flowing patterns. While performing a potential dance of death, he never plants himself in the rooted and stiff stance found in most other martial arts. These coiling and twisting movements are very important. They are central to Ba Gua as a Taoist yogic art, an art entirely centered around the mysterious notion of *qi*.

When a true Ba Gua artist is cornered and under attack, the assailant suddenly finds the would-be prey coiled and twisted, and now, behind him. The physiological by-product that results from this type of martial-yogic exercise develops secondary benefits that are quite significant. Due to its fluid coiling, turning, and twisting, the art of Ba Gua articulates the spine and extremities in ways that maximize health. The muscles next to the spine twist, nerve function increases, and the muscles, ligaments, and tendons stretch.[7] This process is consistent with the *nei tan* internal arts where the muscle groups are counteropposed in order to (as the Chinese traditional phrase refers to the process) "open the joints and the gates of energy." This opening has the effect of improving blood supply to the nerves as well as keeping the body supple and youthful, hence the value of the energy-based Taoist-yogic arts.

Ba Gua, with its many unique and curious features, developed in the late 1800s. Although it is one of the youngest traditional Chinese martial arts, Ba Gua since it served an urgent purpose, quickly gained in popularity. It filled a

need for imperial and private bodyguards. As is the case with all martial arts, need contributed to development.

In the late 1800s, partisan groups, secret societies, robber barons, murderers, and thieves were ripping Chinese society apart. Foreign armies of Western nations were in the process of occupying the country. The government was impotent. Life was cheap, and it was easy to find someone to rob, kidnap, or murder for a handful of silver. In this era of Western imperialism, the opium trade, propagated by the British occupiers, was thriving in the foreign and black markets. Chinese public officials, including the police, were corrupt and did little to protect the citizenry.

龍門
Lung Men

It was during this time that Ba Gua evolved. Authoritative sources credit its development to one man, Dong Hai-Chuan, who blended aspects of his previous martial training with *qi* and meditative training exercises that he practiced as a member of the Taoist sect, *Chuan Chen* (Complete Truth). This sect, of the *Lung Men* (Dragon Gate) school of Taoism, used ritualized practice to alter their state of mind. Members of the *Lung Men* sect chanted while walking in a circle. There can be no doubt that this method of using circle-walking for meditative training had an important developmental influence on Dong's synthesis of his martial skills into a new art. The system he developed was a method of combat that employed Taoist philosophical and yogic aspects while circle-walking. It harmonized mind and body and, due to the nature of its circular methodology, employed a revolutionary concept in self-defense. Ba Gua practitioners never approach defense in straight lines (forceful opposition to forceful attack), but use every curve of every joint to conform internal angularities to external angles of attack and defense. This approach was not only more powerful but it utilized a method that a potential enemy could not counter.

The art form that Dong Hai-Chuan developed emphasized striking with unexpected speed and hidden power: evading a grasp, striking an assailant from behind, then disabling or killing a second or third attacker all within a few seconds. These became the street-proven qualities known as the "eight trigram palm." Fighting skills that were developed through Ba Gua's unique system of training emphasized fast stepping in circular patterns with swift changes of direction and properly aligned "internal" striking. Some of the combat methodology is included in Chapter Six.

As Ba Gua's effectiveness became legendary, various schools of Ba Gua emerged in old Peking. These schools were based on the variant teaching methods of Dong Hai-Chuan. His students were differentially taught according to their stature, previous training, and strengths. For example, Yin Fu, a small man with a slight build, was taught evasion and adept footwork, emphasizing Ba

Gua's characteristic stepping skills. Disciple Cheng Ting-Hwa, known for his expertise in *Suai Qiao* (Chinese wrestling, joint breaking, and throwing), trained in Ba Gua skills that emphasized close-in fighting and grappling with joint locking, joint breaking, and manipulation techniques.

From these beginnings the art has weathered the immense social and political changes in China. It is testimony to the art's effectiveness that it has flourished and continues to be taught throughout the world.

The ethos and spirit of Ba Gua is contained in the / *Ching* or Book of Changes, the ancient classic of wisdom and philosophy. Its roots predating Chinese history, it has been adopted by Taoists and Confucians alike as a wisdom text that, as a way of studying all phenomenon, codifies the events of creation into the binary system of yin and yang. In this codex, yin is negative or receptive while yang is positive and creative. The interplay of these forces is called the principle of opposites. Since Ba Gua is modeled on this philosophy, it also concerns itself with this yin and yang interplay of opposites, applying these laws not only to the philosophical and spiritual, but to the physical as well. This gives a tremendous depth to the art, making it supreme as a system of health as well as method of self-defense.

易經
/ *Ching*

The movements of Ba Gua are designed to nourish *qi*, the life force, and thus prevent disease. They improve the circulation of blood and create harmony and efficiency of the body by reducing unnatural friction and pressure on the joints. In the course of a normal day, the forces of weight and gravity, together with artificially constant, flat and level walking surfaces, interact with human tendencies to hold tension and "swing" weight. This places unnatural loads on the body. In seeking the path of least resistance, the body denatures its musculoskeletal balance. Muscle groups moving out of balance become either weak or flaccid or tense and locked-up. Proper and balanced exercises, such as those found in Ba Gua Zhang, reverse these deleterious effects and neutralize aging and deterioration trends through a balanced, "soft" exercise that keeps tendons and joints flexible.

To master Ba Gua Zhang, one must understand the three theories (see box on the next page). Then, with diligent practice, skills will increase systematically. Soon serious students will be strong and able. The art is that of change of both body and mind. A hint for the dedicated student would be to pay close attention to the concept of opening and closing joints. The flux between the opening and closing is the interplay of yin and yang in the human body and the method of maintaining full range of motion. The secret of power and health lies between the opening and the closing.

游身
YoSen

The *Yo Sen* (swimming or "coiling") body style of training physically develops your body in a way that will make it feel as though it is weightless; like

THE THREE THEORIES OR RULES OF PRACTICE

1. Move Forward and Withdraw
2. Link Mind and Body
3. Practice the Method of Constant Change

swimming, its motions are fluid and continuous. This training is characterized by unique patterns of movement and special walking methods, which are light but at the same time strong. It relies on the components of mind *(xin)* and intent *(yi).* These are important ideas that will be discussed later.

There are many deep aspects in Ba Gua Zhang. Among these are the mysteries of the earlier and later heaven, the eight gates, the yin and yang, and the merging of yin and yang with the five elements. Ba Gua Zhang is indeed a deep art.

心
xin

Regarding the basics of Ba Gua mechanics, there are thirty-six exercises (or "turns") of the upper body, and seventy-two "legs," lower body maneuvers. The thirty-six turns utilize leverage and rotational relationships of the joints for power and health. The seventy-two legs refer to stepping and kicking mechanics of the lower body.

意
yi

Ba Gua possesses rarely taught secrets within the art as well, such as special strength training and self-defense skills such as the art of attacking the vital points. The final aim, however, is to strengthen bones and protect the body from disease. It is an art that develops from clear and precise principles of movement and mechanics. Although it began as a physical discipline, the hidden roots and ultimate results of these principles are spiritual. Through practice the student learns to harmonize with the forces of life that predate time. It is said that Ba Gua practice begins and ends with the spirit.

CHAPTER TWO

Internal Power and Internal Martial Arts

Taoists, beginning over two thousand years ago, used their own bodies as trial and error laboratories to extensively research the nature of human energy to achieve union with the mysterious Tao.[8] Most important of their discoveries was the art and science of internal power, *qi*. However, the existence of an intrinsic energy field system separate from the blood and nervous systems is not yet accepted in modern physiology. This chapter will examine the matter of internal energy in three divergent ways. Although other traditional cultures such as those of India have similar systems, this discussion will focus on internal energy or *qi* from a traditional Chinese perspective, particularly the ancient Taoist tradition.

道
tao

This chapter explores the ancient Taoist yogic traditions and their application to internal martial arts, and examines the skepticism about *qi* and its increasing acceptance as a physical reality in the West. Guidelines for evaluating "qi phenomenon" where human participation is involved can be found at the end of the chapter.

Qi: Martial Arts Mystery

Ba Gua and other internal arts became legendary not because of their flowing movements, moving meditation aspects, flowing silk uniforms, or sagely appearance but their realistic and sublime fighting skills. It is widely known that the great legends of the art like Dong Hai-Chuan, Cheng Ting-Hwa, and Sun Lu-Tang displayed uncanny abilities rarely seen today. Dong could move effortlessly through and around a group of attackers without being touched. Cheng was famous for his ability to neutralize an attacker, lock his arms, and take him to the ground in a matter of seconds. The skill of Sun has been well documented. Even at an elderly age his students could not keep up with him, not even "grab

his coattails" while practicing his "pacing through the foothills" exercises.

What was it that made these skills appear so supernatural? Great knowledge is seldom evidenced today and many practitioners possess little or no awareness of the art's subtle and profound aspects. Often Ba Gua as practiced today has been transformed into a "show art" characterized by flowing movements and silk uniforms. Before one can understand and replicate the skills of past masters an understanding of the roots of internal power that were the cornerstone of their knowledge is essential. The essence of the real art is the same as it was in its early beginnings: combat skill coupled with internal power.

Types of internal martial art power

Two types of power are used in Ba Gua and the other internal arts; both methods are called "internal." Fundamentally, internal power begins with physical mechanics or *mingjing,* which translates as "obvious force." With correct training, students naturally progress from obvious force to *anjing,* "hidden power" and ultimately, *huajing,* "mysterious power."[9]

明勁
mingjing

安勁
anjing

Mingjing, literally "bright" or "observable" power, is the term used for physical mechanics of the internal. Instead of "throwing" a punch in the conventional manner, the internal artist learns to move in ways that coordinate and balance the body up and down, front to back. A vertical axis throughout the body is maintained instead of horizontal swing common to most external styles and boxers.[10] Efficient movement oriented toward balanced, counteropposing muscle groups replace physical tension. Smooth efficiency is used instead of the raw power and torque found in most other styles of strike-based martial arts. Training is based on efficiency and coordination with relaxed movements that allow *qi* and blood to circulate optimally. This category of training, because it does not rely on torque, heals the body through harmony and balance.

When *mingjing* is *correctly* practiced, the student naturally begins to develop more advanced "internal" levels. It is a process of tuning oneself to a once common state reminiscent of deep connections to nature, where mankind walked with a fluid, natural gait, effortlessly developed by walking on natural, not artificial, terrain. Our bodies were designed for uneven ground, not smooth, flat surfaces. Variable pressure resulting from the foot stepping on uneven ground has a profound impact on health and power because of the way the body receives and responds to the force of the step. This is the basic principle behind foot acupressure and various other foot therapies in the present day. Even today people who live close to nature, climb trees, and walk on unpaved ground naturally develop the connected power of *mingjing.* To regain natural power, "civilized"

people must relearn it. Learning to create variable pressure in the body that imitates the design of nature, and learning not to create and carry unnatural tension and "lock up." The effects brought about by this type of training are powerful. When the student is successful in developing this type of power, it allows a man or a woman the ability to defend themselves with minimal effort even into their later years when advantages of agility and youthful strength are no longer present. This is one of the great secrets of all internal arts.

As illustrated above, *mingjing* type of power is not something exclusive to the internal arts. Some sports use internal style *mingjing* more than others. The golf stroke is a good example of this type of power. In this sport natural balance is of primary importance when the *forward and upward momentum* of a golfer performing a strong golf drive is matched by his *downward force* pressing against the earth as he swings through. For an effective swing, the shoulders are relaxed and the waist directs the power forward with mechanics that adjust to force with equal backward and downward pressures. One of my teachers, Ho Shen-Ting, described this principle as "100 percent forward, 100 percent backward," by which he meant that internal power has a bidirectional internal movement of muscle groups within the body.

賀順定
Ho Shen-Ting

Correctly applied, internal *mingjing* power is invisible to the eye of an untrained observer. In fact, the performance may even appear "soft" or weak, although in reality it may be surprisingly powerful. Internal power like this is relaxed and doesn't require foot stomping or added torque to achieve effect anymore than the pro-golfer needs stomping or added torque while performing a swing. Controlled relaxation is important and tension, especially that which is characterized by "grunting" and the appearance of excessive muscular tension, is antithetical to the development of this type of power.

Mingjing as a science of movement is based on Taoist yogic practices originating almost two thousand years ago. Designed to stimulate energy centers and open energetic pathways, the effect of this type of training is especially strong in opening the eight extra meridians associated with Taoist yoga.[11]

The mechanics of *mingjing* just described stimulate the meridian and energetic system of the body and encourage the development of *huajing*, or "hidden power." *Huajing* is unique to internal martial arts and is based on Taoist yogic alchemy. It involves the movement and transformation of the body's *qi*. For the student, *huajing* is an exciting stage of development since it is where he or she learns to feel the flow of internal energy in his or her body. Most report that it feels like currents of heat, pressure, and/or electricity. It is developed and controlled through Taoist breathing exercises, *qi gong* posture, and

氣功
qigong

,^. yi

the will, *"yi."* When someone first develops this "hidden power" they can be quite dangerous, since the expression of power will not feel like anything special, and since the skill is not yet consistent and the pugilist doesn't yet recognize the subtle cues as to when he or she is "on." Occasionally students have had to be cautioned when coming into this power to be very careful since their "lightly touching" another student in a demonstration may result in the partner being dropped to the ground and possibly hurt. Senior instructors breathe much easier when the students coming into this power start to figure out the cues.

Energy systems

Once the correct mechanics and other precursors of the internal arts have taken, the student will make progress at an ever-increasing rate. The evolution of an internal artist moves toward direct personal experience of the internal energy moving within his or her body. Knowledge of how to move correctly, how to breathe correctly, and how to stand correctly become less abstract and increasingly experiential as the student detects the flow and blockages of *qi* in the body. This involves the sensation of *qi* in the body becoming a type of biofeedback signal. Sensations of electric-like tingling and/or heat traveling throughout the body will be noticed. With sensitivity and personal experiment, presence of the "signal" informs the student if he or she is correct, where absence of the signal indicates that a particular movement is "off." Through this method the student perceives when something is out of balance. Say, for example, the shoulder complex tends to be held tightly instead of released when the student lifts his or her arm. The student who has evolved to the point of sensing the movement *oiqi* in the body will notice pressure or a trapped heat feeling in the shoulder. The ability to directly sense energetic flow ensures greater success in correcting the problem. During the student's experimentation with the angle variation of his or her arm he or she has access to another set of criteria compared with the student who does not have direct experiential feedback. Students who sense *qi* in the way just described are on the path to mastery and more.

This way of understanding the body will be extrapolated to areas outside of the martial. For instance, a typical result is that the student gains ability to directly affect his or her physical health; through the ability to detect imbalances he or she will often be in tune with his body and in many cases will be able to detect imbalances before serious illness sets in, such as allowing for corrections to take place in diet, exercise patterns or lifestyle. Students like this find that the right hint from a knowledgeable coach encourages leaps instead of steps in their progress.

Qi, and mind-body-spirit development

The ability to tune in and directly experience *qi* sensations assists the student with progress in spiritual and meditative practices. Three assumptions about *qi* are useful. First, although *qi* is not fully understood by science, the phenomenon exists in the physical universe. Second, it can be monitored and controlled by the student. And third, development and balance of *qi* in humans is associated not only with mental and physical optimization, but spiritual or emotional states as well. In the same way that physical health can be monitored by one's tuning into the biofeedback *qi* signals (and assuming an ideal mind-body-spirit state is possible to attain), subtle adjustments can be made in one's thought processes and emotional blockages (unbalanced *qi)* can be ferreted out by the yz'-yogic practitioner.

It is very recent that medical science and psychology have begun to understand that the mind, mental-emotional and physical body function interconnectedly as a total unit. For example, a now common therapy for the treatment of phobia is to train patients in physical relaxation techniques. Irrational fear, as any fear, is strongly associated with physical tension. It is essentially impossible to be fearful while in a relaxed state. The ability to eliminate irrational fear goes hand-in-hand with the induction of relaxation. This principle from modern psychology is just one of many Taoist approaches to mind-body integration that are being validated by scientific research today. This approach, the converging point of mind-body-spirit, places applied Taoism as one of the oldest holistic health systems in the world.

Applied (religious) Taoism

Ancient Chinese Taoists developed deep insights into human nature in areas of psychology, physical health, and spirit. They understood the negative health consequences of socially manufactured stress and the deleterious effects of imbalanced physical movement on physical and emotional health. Their approach to

PHILOSOPHICAL TAOISM 500 B.C.	APPLIED (RELIGIOUS) TAOISM FROM 200 A.D.	→ TAOIST TRADITIONS BORN
The writings of Lao Tzu and Chuang Tzu	Merging of three separate traditions, previously separate yin-yang school, neo-Confucianism, and Taoism. New system sought physical immortality and magical power. Birth of proto science.	Traditional medicine Metallurgy Sexual yogas Healing massage Physio-therapeutics

道家
Tao Chia

道教
Tao Jiao

丹
tan

understanding the human condition has a lineage to it and did not just appear one day from the writings of Lao Tzu alone. The most important influence is a great body of work collectively called "Taoist yoga." These exercises, originating from Taoist philosophy, promoted a return to natural laws, gave birth to mind-body unification exercises, and were a way of understanding life. Most often approaches that involve mastery of internal energy and mind-body unification in ancient China have their roots in Taoist philosophy and ancient psycho-physiological exercises. It is useful to examine the source of these ideas.

Although philosophical Taoism, *Tao Chia* (literally Taoist family) existed since the writing attributed to Lao Tzu around 500 B.C., new approaches to Taoist study, *Tao Jiao*, or "applied" Taoism (usually translated as "religious Taoism") became popular several hundred years later.[12] This tradition from ancient days of China, around 200 B.C., became the foundation of medical and mystical practices.



A painting of Ko Hung at his alchemical laboratory

About 300 years after the birth of Taoism, the then separate school of yin-yang blended with the declining neo-Confucian school and philosophical Taoism to create a new and separate genre unlike anything seen before in human history. New schools, collectively called applied or "religious" Taoism, emerged that believed that man was a model and reflection of the entire universe. Practitioners of this ideology believed that they could access the secrets of life and death and manipulate the normal life cycle process with resultant deterioration through alchemical and yogic practices and that this manipulation would empower them with the ability to grasp and act upon the essence of life. Some of these schools sought to break the bond of death and obtain physical immortality through ingestion of a special formula, in Chinese, called *tan.* Secret prescriptions that were common to these schools were compressed, dried, and treated in myriad ways and finally brought to boil in the alchemist's vessel in search of the secret drug of immortality.[13]

Early Taoist alchemists

The original Taoist alchemists were later called *wai tan* or "outer alchemists." Their main goal was to obtain the secret elixir of immortality. The means to this end was to compound substances such as mercury and gold in their alchemical furnace to create the "immortal pill." They believed that by ingesting the correct compound they would attain physical immortality. As was the case with early scientists and alchemists in the West such as Newton, this work developed into a proto-science that led to other discoveries.[14] In China research of the alchemists led to multitudinous discoveries, including advancements in medical herbology and metallurgy and the discovery of gunpowder.

外丹
•*wai tan*

The nei tan tradition

The *nei tan* or "inner alchemical" school was concerned with the development of the *nei qi*, or inner *qi.* Although the roots of the inner tradition lie in the outer alchemical tradition, it is difficult to provide an exact date for the beginning of what was to be identified as the "inner yogic tradition." One of the earliest and most important texts of both the outer and inner alchemical schools, *The Nei Pien* of the alchemist Ko Hung, treated both disciplines in 320 A.D. The classical Chinese alchemical text *Tao Tsang* dates from 730 A.D. Another text, the *Tien Yuan Fu Yao Ching* (Mirror of the Heavenly Essence Medicine Classic) written in 940 A.D., illustrates the typical prose of the tradition:

内氣
nei qi

> If the water is true water, and the fire is true fire,
> And if you can bring them to bed together,
> Then you will never see old age.[15]

Again, the original goal of the inner alchemical Taoists was to compound within their bodies the elixir or pill of immortality. Choosing *nei yao,* or "inner medicine" over "outer medicine," these quests extrapolated models taken from the "external" experimentation of the outer alchemist's pot, and applied them to the search for answers within the human body. Few martial artists today realize that the concept of the *tan tien (tanden* in Japanese) derives from the Taoist internal yogic tradition; the term *tan* (or *dan)* refers to the secret drug of immortality that participants in the yogic tradition believed could be developed in the area of the lower belly (the *tien*, literally, "field"). Thus, *tan tien* translates as the "field of the elixir of immortality."

内藥
inner medicine

丹田
tan tien

The "pure" *nei tan* Taoists rejected the necessity of outside substances to transform body and spirit and sought longevity via internal change, a process called *lien tan,* or "exercising the *tan."* Taoist yogas called *Tao Yin* developed, appropriating the tradition and terminology of the outer alchemists.[16] These yogas were

練丹
lien tan

導引
Tao Yin

physical exercises designed to enhance and transform the *nei qi.* The alchemist Ko Hung described the process in this way:

> In forming and fashioning the transforming power (of nature), there is none more powerful than man. Therefore, he who penetrates to its shallower (aspects) can put all things to his service, while he who penetrates to its deeper (aspects) can enjoy eternal life.

It is interesting that over 300 years ago the West took some note of these physio-therapeutic systems. In China during the later 1700s, a missionary Jesuit priest named Cibot wrote a journal on the subject which discussed Taoist yogic health practices. In this French publication, the first of its kind published in the West, he discussed respiratory and other health techniques practiced by the Taoists:

> The various exercises of the Cong Fu (Kung fu) if correctly performed, should relieve or clear all those illnesses which arise from an embarrassed, retarded, or even interrupted circulation. But, how many diseases are there which have a cause other than this? One may well ask whether, apart from fractures and wounds which injure the organization of the human body, there are any such diseases.[17]

Taoist yoga and the martial arts

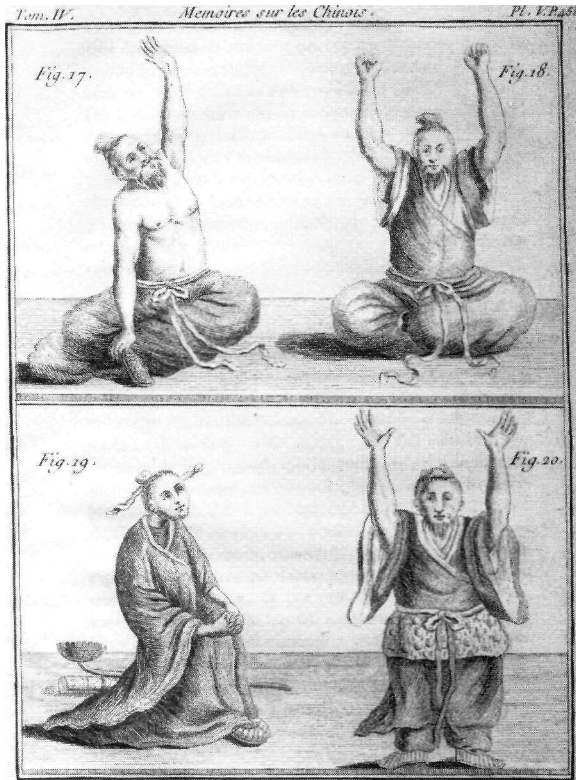
内功 *nei kung*

顚倒 *tien tao*

The question of inner power in the martial arts is fascinating. To some, the mastery of this enigmatic force is considered to be the quintessence of martial arts evolution. Inner power skill, *nei kung,* involves the link of mind and body and results in enhancement of human potential. In the Taoist-based internal martial art tradition, manifestation of this force occurs in tandem with self-mastery. The Taoists that began the *nei tan* tradition were fascinated with the subject of the life force. Where the *wai tan* Taoists sought to create the *tan,* the drug of immortality in their alchemical furnaces, the *nei tan* Taoists, to varying extents, rejected the external model of the outer tradition and sought to recreate the elixir of immortality in their own persons without chemical or other external means. The *nei tan* Taoists were obsessed with reversing the decaying process that leads toward death, and sought to compound within their bodies the secret elixir (or pill) of physical immortality so as to go contrary to nature, a process called *tien tao.* This was the springboard to the development of their interest in the *nei qi,* or internal *qi.* The traditions of the inner and outer alchemist, sometime separate, at other times blending, shared interest in the "life force." Their extensive anecdotal research gave rise to herbology and physio-therapeutic exercises that became the foundations of the Taoist yogic tradition.

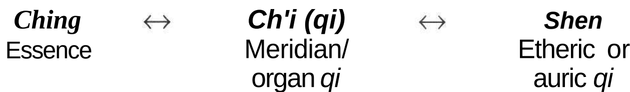
The *ching-ch'i-shen* model

The quest to compound the mysterious elixir within their bodies became the impetus that led to unique and varied methods used by Taoist yogis in the search for immortality. Among the *nei tan* adepts who sought the answer to their quest within the microcosm of their own body, the *ching-ch 'i-shen* model was a fundamental means with which to understand yogic practice. This model, the classical Taoist internal alchemy formula, defines internal energy as a spectrum with three densities, ranging from coarse to insubstantial. This internal energy spectrum is basic to traditional Chinese medicine, Taoist yogas, and internal martial arts. It holds that pure essence, *ching,* transmutes to the working energy in the body, *qi,* and further to auric or spiritual *qi, shen.*



Drawings of Taoist *nei tan* yogic practices recorded in Cibot's journal, *Notice du Cong Fu des Bonzes Tao-see,* circa 1778.

Taoist Inner-Alchemical Model



Ching	↔	***Ch'i (qi)***	↔	***Shen***
Essence		Meridian/ organ *qi*		Etheric or auric *qi*

The Taoist inner alchemical tradition concerns itself with these three aspects or qualities of *qi,* often described in archaic Taoist texts as *San Yuan* or *San Chen Yuan,* translated as the three primordial essences or three true primordial essences. Thus, the *chen ch* V *(jen qi)* (the true *qi)* is developed from purifying and enhancing three qualities or aspects of *qi* shown in the above model.

My earliest exposure to this model and how it applied to internal martial arts was *Chinese Boxing: Masters if Methods* and *Hsing I: Mind Form, Boxing,* both by Robert Smith, when they were first published in 1974.[18,19] Smith researched the internal boxing arts in Taiwan from 1959 to 1962. His work was the first to bring details of these esoteric concepts to Western martial art enthusiasts. Through this work, internal stylists in the West were first exposed to strange and mysterious concepts such as changing sperm *(ching)* into *qi* and *qi* into emptiness *(shen).* This is the central puzzle of the Taoist arts: The transmutation of *qi* and transmogrification of the body.

精氣神
ching-ch 'i-shen

神
Shen

三元
San Yuan

三眞元
San Chen Yuan

眞氣
jen qi

Ching

Although modern Chinese dictionaries translate *"ching"* as semen, this is not the original meaning of the term. The word "essence" is more appropriate to the

精
ching

alchemical model, which translates *ching* as the most dense aspect of internal energy in the body. Closely associated with both semen and spinal fluid, it is stored and manufactured in the kidneys and is associated with reproductive energy; hence it is identified with semen and the very essence of life. In males, it is depleted by ejaculation; in this way, Taoist sexology and its relation to life-span ideas developed, and for these reasons, the conservation of *ching* is important. Taoist yogic formulas prioritize energy balance. Moderation in sexual relations by male aspirants was considered by the ancient Taoists to be of primary importance since *ching* lost during ejaculation contained the essence of life.[20] An ancient Taoist text discussed the subject before 800 A.D. in this way:

形
hsing

> One's life-span depends upon oneself. If one can conserve the seminal essence (ching), and obtain the chhi [sic], one may attain longevity without end ... maintain the form (hsing) without (harmful) exertion, conserve the seminal essence (ching) without (harmful) agitation, restore the mind (hsin) to ataraxy and peace. That is how longevity can be attained.[21]

Ko Hung, in the most famous text on Taoist alchemy, the *Pao Pu Tzu,* says this on the subject:

> It is of course inadmissible that a man should sit and bring illness and anxieties upon himself by not engaging in sexual intercourse. On the other hand if he indulges his lusts inordinately and indiscriminately, unable to moderate his seminal dispersals, he might as well take an ax to the tree of his life span.[22]

Shen

神
shen

According to Taoist yogic theory, while the most dense aspect of *qi* is *ching,* the most ethereal is the *shen. Shen* is the subtle energy field that surrounds the physical body. In strong cases, the focus and control of this energetic field is most probably the mechanism underlying the healing by laying-on of hands, and it is most certainly synonymous or closely associated with the aura.

Most cultures have the depiction of a circle, flame or glow around portraits of their saints or holy beings. This is the *shen,* the radiant energy that some people, especially young children, have the ability to see. *Shen* is developed through deep thought, spiritual practice, meditation, saying less, and becoming in tune with the rhythm of nature. Wrong thinking such as the habitual judgment or criticism of others destroys spiritual *qi* and must be avoided. *Shen* is ruled by the heart and governs the mind. *Shen* disturbance affects the

mind's ability to have clear judgment. A very serious case of *shen* disturbance is an involuntary shaking or quivering of the tongue while the person is speaking. I once observed this symptom of *shen* disturbance in a man who, obsessed with his perceived powers over nature, believed he was able to cause earthquakes and other calamities in distant lands.

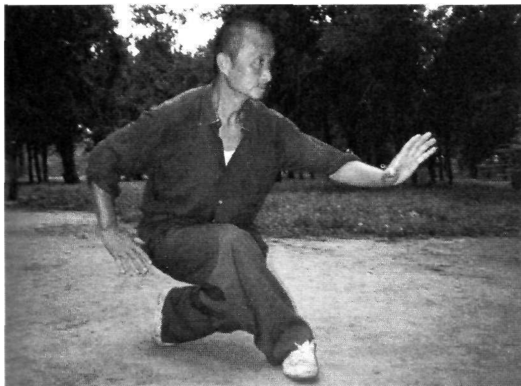


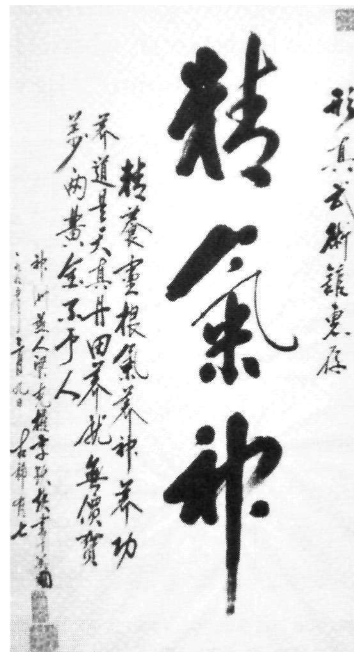
1600s:Woodblock print showing Taoist adept meditating on the three aspects of *ch'i (qi):* the *ching, ch'i,* and *shen* at the *tan tien* locus.

Ch'i (Qi) proper: meridian and organ *qi*

Qi as used in this formula refers to meridian *qi.* It is the *qi* of daily life, of organ *qi* and blood. It is manipulated through postures and breathing and is the domain of traditional Chinese medicine. Taoist yogis developed multifarious approaches concerning the regulation, development, storage, and manifestation of the *qi* flow. This knowledge became the basis of traditional Chinese medicine.\This *qi* is nurtured by correct, balanced exercise and retained by quiet reflection. Practice of die art of "not talking too much" is important to safeguard meridian *qi.*"

I have found that the search for understanding of this mysterious *ching-ch'i-shen* formula to be of die utmost importance—not because of the martial artist's ability to gain mysterious powers or physical immortality, but because it is an estimable system for understanding man as an interconnected energetic entity. It is a holistic system that appeals to those who seek understanding of their nature, and offers an approach to physical, mental, and spiritual health.





Cursive calligraphy by internal martial art master Lyang Ke-Quan (see photo at left). The poem is about the ching-chi shen alchemical model. The main body translates approximately as:

"Ching Qi Shen

Nurture the spiritual root, nurture spirit, nurture skill, and nurture Tao.
From heaven develop the true tan tien. Nurture the dragon.
The endless, priceless jewel worth many measure of gold is not easily given away.
March 9, 1995 Lyang Ke-Quan, the writings of an old man."

Martial arts and health of body and mind

Martial arts have a long tradition in Chinese culture. Credit is traditionally given to the Buddhist monk Ta Mo (Bodhidharma), who came from India to China in the sixth century A.D., for beginning a tradition of merging physical training with spiritual practice. Tradition holds that he found the monks of the Shaolin temple in such poor physical shape that he created a system of exercise to train them. The goal of these exercises was to improve their ability to sit for prolonged periods in meditation. The "Muscle and Tendon Changing Classic" is attributed to Ta Mo:

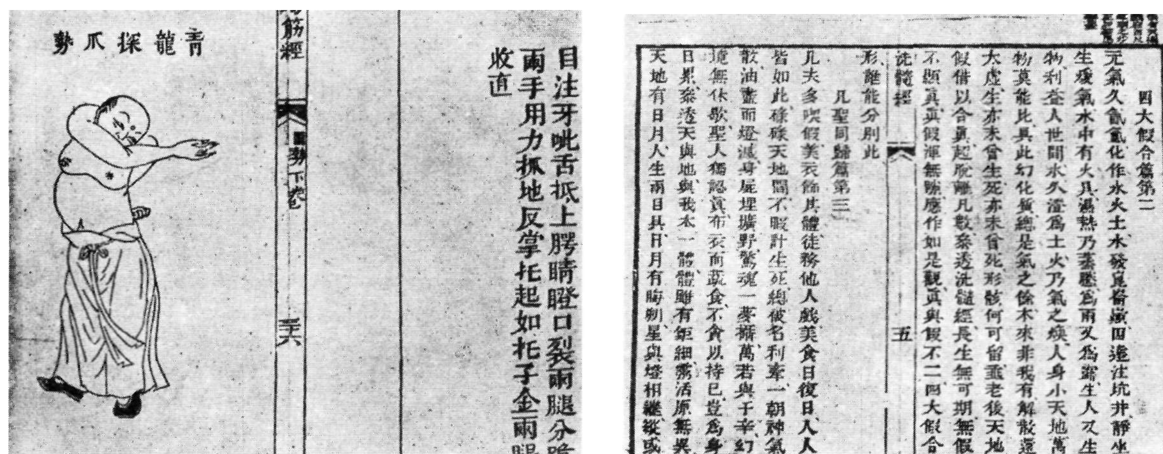
> The spirit should be tranquil and alert, but the body should be strong and active. Without tranquility one cannot attain wisdom and transformation into a Buddha, without health one cannot have good circulation and breathing. Hence, the body should be properly exercised so that the muscle and tendons may be supple and the spirit will not then suffer from the misery of weakness.[23]

Thus, the Shaolin tradition, with its mind-body linking, became the ideal for martial artists for many years. However, it wasn't until the end of the eighteenth century that Taoist physio-therapeutic exercises developed and harnessed *qi* as mainstream martial arts practice.

Internal martial arts are born

内家拳
nei chia ch'uan

The first written record of a distinctive internal style martial art *(nei chia ch 'uari)* occurs in the 1600s where Huan Tsung-Hsi described a system of self-defense "counter to Shaolin." His written commentary included notes on "internal



Texts on "marrow washing" and "muscle and tendon changing" attributed to Ta Mo.

training" and "soft style" strategy.[24] Of particular interest is his principle of "stillness overcoming movement," a central theme in Taoist martial arts. However, it wasn't until the eighteenth century that the next text appeared on internal martial art which described "soft movements" that circulated the *qi*.[25]

Although the t'ai chi classics have been described as having a "pre-nineteenth century core," it wasn't until the mid-nineteenth century that Chinese intellectuals began to take serious interest in writing about and studying the internal styles.[26] Li I-Yu (1832-82) was perhaps the first intellectual to write on the subject of internal *qi* and the martial arts with *nei tan* internal yogic references. In his writing about *t'ai chi ch 'uan,* Li used Taoist alchemical terms and linked them to martial arts. Below is a sample of his writing from "Song of the Essence of T'ai Chi Ch'uan" as translated by Douglas Wile:[27]

> How wonderful is *t'ai chi ch'uan,*
> Whose movements follow nature!
> … the whole body is filled with one unbroken *ch'i*
> Above and below are without imbalance.
> … moving the *ch'i* like coiling silk
> … the *ch'i* sinks to the *tan t'ien*
> ... use the mind and not strength
> … All of this is a function of the mind,
> And has nothing to do with brute force.
> … yin and yang must complement each other
> … Movement arises from stillness,
> But even in movement there is a stillness.
> The spirit leads the *ch* V in its movement...

And finally the most classical of *t'ai chi* expressions:

> "Let the strongest aggressor attack us, while four ounces defeat a thousand pounds."

The genesis of internal martial art occurs at the juncture of intellectuals and their interest in the martial arts, beginning in the late 1800s. Prior to this time, the martial artist and the intellectual elite were separated by a wide social class gulf; martial artists were almost exclusively ruffians and the development of fighting skills was associated with criminal behavior.[28] Throughout the previous two thousand years martial artists had not been thought of very highly by the intellectual elite. In 300 B.C. Chuang Tzu described swordsmen in the following way:

"... men with tousled heads and bristling beards, with slouching caps tied with plain, coarse tassels and robes cut short behind, who glare fiercely and speak with great difficulty, who slash at one another..,"[29]

Intellectuals, on the other hand, were Confucianists steeped in the classics whose main goal, until the collapse of the Ching government in the early days of this century, was to pass a difficult and endless series of exams. It was only by passing these exams that one could acquire positions in government or higher society.

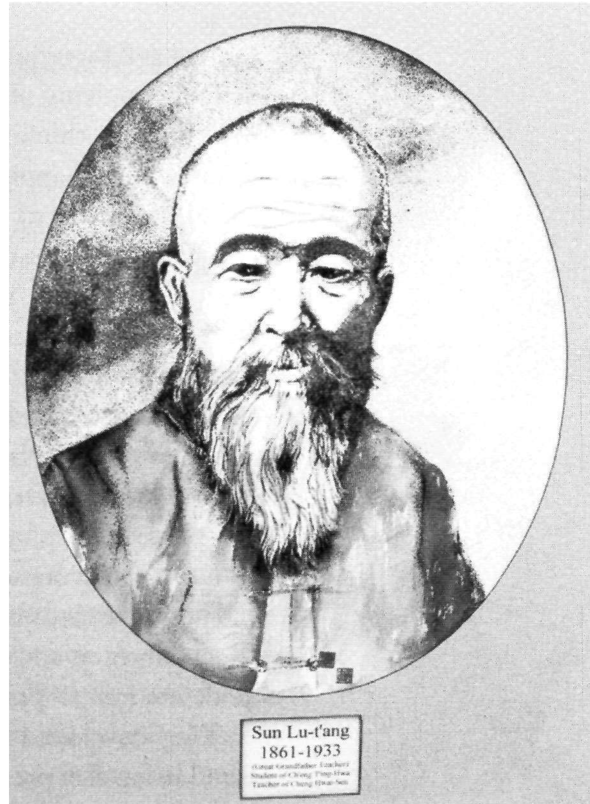
The impetus for the merging of these groups was the instability of the 1800s. The government and police were corrupt and secret societies formed to create resistance groups and exact tributes from landholders. The difficulty of the times created a need for intellectuals to become involved in martial arts to protect their interests when the state could not. Discussing the authors of the *T'ai Chi Classics,* Douglas Wile states that the "... families' preoccupation with martial arts may have been a very timely response to a practical need for personal defense and to develop skills necessary for militia training."[30] For reasons of national pride and self-defense, Chinese intellectuals began to acquire interest in the martial arts, particularly the internal, from the nineteenth century Boxer rebellion onward.

孫祿堂
Sun Lu-Tang

The first author to write about the internal arts and label the styles of Ba Gua, Xing Yi, and T'ai Chi as being of the same family was Sun Lu-Tang, who wrote extensively on these styles in the 1920s. The transmutation of internal *qi* was a common topic in his writings. Sun's writing reflected the merging of Taoist yogas, which had existed over a thousand years, with martial arts practice near the turn of the century. It was during this time that philosophers and yogis together adopted martial arts as a vehicle of self-mastery, integrating "inner" physical, mental, and spiritual yogas into the "internal" system. Sun's words on the subject illustrate the Taoist concepts that were applied to martial arts:

Tao embodies the universe and is the foundation of the yin and the yang. In boxing, Tao symbolizes the nei-chia comprising Hsing I, Pa Kua and T'ai Chi. The forms of these three are different, but the principle is the same: everything begins and ends in emptiness. The Yuan-ch'i [original *qi]* must be maintained. This force that keeps the sky blue and the earth calm also makes for achievement in man___I had always heard that boxing is Tao, but I could not really understand it until I learned secret energy *[an ching]...* But when we learned

> mysterious energy *[huajing]* we did not tell each other the sensations we felt. But I want to write of it now. After practicing one form or style, I would stand upright and calm, collecting my *ch'i* and I [mind]. Then I would feel something in my genitals. I felt it everyday. From action came inaction. When I stopped practice I felt everything outside and within me was empty.[31]



Sun Lu-Tang wrote extensively on the subject of the internal arts. (Watercolor painting by Chris Hensley.)

Sun was there to record the birth of the internal martial arts, a nexus linking internal energy development with physical discipline. Others shared Sun's excitement about this new development. This new breed of martial art philosophers became obsessed with penetrating the secrets of life and developing correspondences between the metaphysical five elements and *taiji (t'ai chi)* systems as well as astrology and other systems, including Taoist yogas.

"Why would intellectuals pursue this study? There is no doubt that this focus was in part an attempt to regain their national spirit during the humiliating experience of foreign occupation of their country. Douglas Wile, in *Lost T'ai Chi Classics of the Ching Dynasty,* discusses multiple reasons why intellectuals suddenly became interested in martial art development. He suggests that an interest in mastering an art of personal empowerment may have been a motivating factor.

Wile also suggests that martial arts may have served as a psychological defense (turning inward) against western imperialism of the time; pursuit of the inner Tao provided the means to defeat the enemy with stillness. Where external power was not available, internal power could be. According to Wile: "Perhaps the T'ai Chi training hall, like the pub or playing field in the west, was a space where male psyche, wounded in the real world, could indulge in collective fantasies of power.[32] Other reasons suggested by Wile to explain this sudden and uncharacteristic leaning of intellectuals include the claim that martial arts might allow a "return to nature" by the intelligentsia via Taoist martial art during times of social and political disempowerment. To this end, empowerment could be found in the martial arts. For whatever reason, gifted intellectuals turned toward mastery of Taoist principles, the search for hidden secrets and the application of these principles to the martial arts.

The involvement of this class of martial-thinkers is significant. Only an

educated and thoughtful person could be capable of researching ancient Taoist teachings, applying philosophical principles to their disciplines, writing down their thoughts, thinking about the relationship of an ideal art with respect to natural laws, and applying principles of Taoist "inaction."

In the pursuit of excellence they creatively considered and adopted ideas previously foreign to the martial arts, such as yogic breathing and principles of traditional medicine, to foster personal empowerment. This was in stark contrast to the almost exclusive reliance on the use of brute force by previous martial arts practitioners. Softness normally had (and still has) a negative connotation with respect to self-defense; a soft person is not thought of as being capable of defending him or herself. But, in Taoist terms inaction means softness. And in internal martial art, softness means the subtle use of leverage and advanced mechanics, which appears to an observer as nothing more than relaxed movement.

Early Taoist masters, in their quest for empowerment, found ways to bring mind and body into harmony. They left clues to an optimal way of achieving self-actualization and opened a doorway to a body of knowledge that will forever define human potential.

They developed a style of freedom that came out of a new way of thinking and being that presaged a time when the training of the mind and the body would be inseparable. Holistic health practices and increased integration of the supraliminal mind would form the foundation of a full and happy life. The early martial philosophers have become a model of mastery for serious students of the internal in the late twentieth century.

Did these pugilistic philosophers in their quest to regain social and personal empowerment achieve their goal of tapping latent potential in ways never before seen? Did they penetrate the secret of body-mind-spirit unity? Their speculation and discoveries, verbal and written records passed down from past masters, hold clues to self-actualization and optimization of human potential. The consistent theme left by these past masters is the importance and mastery of *qi*, internal power and the energy of life. Today, with increasing acceptance of *qi* as a true, not imaginary, phenomenon, the student of martial arts has ever-increasing resources to research, understand, and integrate the knowledge of ancient Taoist masters into his or her own study.

What Happened to the Ancient Knowledge of Internal Energy?

Skepticism and increasing acceptance

> While in Hong Kong, Yang was pitted against a well known master of the southern school, who pounced on him like a hungry tiger and was thrown several meters away—with a mere jerk of Yang's forefinger.[33]

As in this accounting of an episode in Yang Chang-Fu's life, martial art literature is replete with many examples of *gao shou,* "mastery," such as the throwing of an opponent with a flick of the finger, or disabling an attacker with the slightest touch; there are other high-level demonstrations of skill that are said to have their roots in *qi* training. What happened to this knowledge and why is it rare to find examples of sublime skill in contemporary masters is the subject of this section.

Assume for a moment that some of the stories about famous masters and their reported abilities in the martial arts are true. Assume also that their ability, as the stories suggest, is mind-body and *qi* mastery. The question changes from skepticism to examining what keeps today's artists from learning the same skills and acquiring the same value of internal art *qi* skill as the famous masters of the past. Why is deep knowledge rarely understood or taught by many senior masters today? In searching for the answers to these questions, a brief overview of the historical context of *qi* training and the social and political events in China over the last seventy years is useful.

Generally speaking, and as has been discussed earlier, Chinese intellectuals were only involved in martial arts research and development for a short time. This reflected a window in time which opened from the North China intelligentsia's need for the martial arts, from before the Boxer period to the restriction from practice due to the occupation of Beijing by Japanese troops during their push to take China. Thus, the zenith of martial art research where ancient philosophy and esoteric knowledge such as Taoist yoga was applied to the martial arts occurred mostly during this period. The involvement of the intellectual elite in the martial arts is extremely important. It takes an educated and thoughtful person to research ancient Taoist teachings, apply philosophical principles to their disciplines, and write down these thoughts, all the while taking into account subtlety, advanced leverage, and breathing for personal empowerment.

The masses had their boxer arts as well. Schools and martial societies too numerous to count developed. However, of those that survive to the present day, the internal martial arts with their application of Taoistic principles were qualitatively different.

In the late 1930s China was engulfed in World War II. Most young men, the crop from which future masters develop, went off to battle and were precluded from the opportunity to study with an internal master during that period. This lack of students severely hindered passing higher internal martial arts knowledge on to the next generation. For China the war did not end in 1945 but continued until 1949 and the end of China's civil war, marked by the Nationalist government's retreat to Taiwan. The new communist government that controlled mainland China was economically and politically isolated from the rest of the world. Economic exclusion, coupled with the previous eleven years of war and massive crop failure, caused one of the worst famines in human history. Hungry men, women, and children roamed the streets of postwar Chinese cities with stomachs that cried for the most meager of morsels. Young men, those most ideal to be trained by the surviving true masters, were concerned with basic survival for themselves and their families; scraps made the difference between life and death.

As crippling as this was, the most devastating blow to the dissemination of traditional kung fu knowledge was yet to come. Only a few years later, the Cultural Revolution (with the exception of some t'ai chi being taught for health) brought with it a strongly enforced ban on martial arts study. During this strongly antitraditional period, masters were not allowed to promote or openly teach their arts. A few did teach secretly in their homes, and we owe them a tremendous debt for the knowledge that they passed down to us today. However, it remains that between 1937 and 1976 in mainland China it was rare for a talented young person to have the opportunity for prolonged, in-depth study with a true master. Therefore, although there are some exceptions, a comprehensively trained, true senior master living today in mainland China must have achieved base proficiency before 1937.

About Taiwan

The Nationalist Chinese withdrew to Taiwan in 1949 with the Communist Chinese army at their heels. Traditional internal masters were not high on the priority list of those who would be selected to go to the island, especially since they lacked wealth and political influence. In the Nationalists' hasty (and ostensibly "temporary") move to Taiwan, priority was given to the politicians, the military officials, and influential persons from the mainland. High preference was not given to the older kung fu masters. Nevertheless, a few accomplished masters of the art were able to go to Taiwan. It is interesting to look at what they encountered on their new island home.

Becoming entranced by Western society, technology, and science, Taiwan has been closely allied with the West, particularly the United States, for many

years. Chinese in Taiwan began to emulate Western dress, culture, and ideology. While Taiwan was becoming Westernized, herbalists, acupuncturists, and especially "superstitious" masters of *qi* were relegated to small side-street and back-alley shop operations, mostly frequented by the older generation. At that time and at least until the 1980s the majority of young people, especially the educated classes, regarded traditional Chinese medicine and especially anything about *qi* as superstitious. In the mid 1980s, only one medical school in Taiwan taught traditional Chinese medicine as part of its curriculum. The situation in Taiwan and Hong Kong was similar to the United States with respect to attitudes toward *qi* and internal power. To discuss *qi* was tantamount to discussing witchcraft or voodoo; it was not seriously discussed by "logical minded" and "educated" people. This idea continues to the present. As recently as 1992, Ken Fish, an American master of martial arts, discussed internal power *(anjing)* and the concept of hidden strength. According to Fish, internal arts training involves learning to control muscle groups "not usually thought of as being under conscious control." He interpreted advanced levels *of hua jing* as involving "the ability to subtly contract several large muscle groups in a manner almost imperceptible to one's opponent."[34] This trend of minimizing the mystical or spiritual aspects of martial arts is now popular in many "internal" martial art circles.

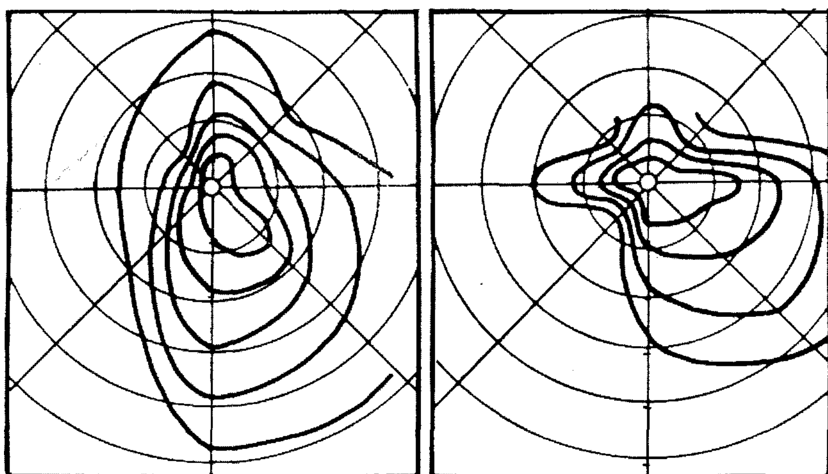
The prevailing notion that anything involving the idea of *qi* was superstitious, a folk belief of a bygone era, is significant since *qi* was the cornerstone of traditional Chinese medicine as well as the basis of the traditional internal martial arts. Thus, teachers who taught about training the body's internal energy were most often dismissed as superstitious. I remember teaching courses on acupressure in the early 1980s and having to offer alternative explanations of how acupuncture and acupressure worked so as to make it palatable to Westerners. I referenced acupuncture and white-blood-cell-count studies, nerve blood supply theories and other "acceptable" Western "approved" explanations as a way to convince students that there was something to be said for acupuncture and Chinese medicine and that this healing art was not restricted to the confines of magic and superstition. In Taiwan few educated martial artists persisted in their study of an art that was not only based on superstition but offered, even after years of dedicated study, no promise of significant financial gain. A certain amount of intellectual ability, along with physical training, is required to master the subtle and esoteric portions of the art. Capable students who would meet this challenge (and whose families would permit it) were few.

The validity of *qi* as a subject of study in the West

The respectability of *qi* as a subject of study began with the opening of China proper to the West. The younger generation in the United States today does

not realize that from 1.949 to 1973 the United States and most of the Western world pretended that the Chinese government, representing a billion Chinese on the mainland, did not exist. They gave recognition and political association for all the Chinese people to the exiled national government on the island of Taiwan, at that time often referred to as "Free China."

The mainland, in its forced isolation from the West, withdrew into itself. Left to its own resources, folk medicine of all types was often all the mainland had to offer the masses. Chinese hospitals began to use and apply scientific principle of investigation to acupuncture, herbal remedies, and other traditional therapies. It is ironic that without mainland China's isolation, acupuncture and other traditional therapies might have become extinct. When it later opened, it was the Chinese advancements in acupuncture that intrigued the West. Once witnessed, what surgeon would not be fascinated with a brain-tumor removal accompanied by acupuncture anathesia where the patient was able to remain conscious and speak with the doctors during the procedure?



ELECTRICAL CONDUCTIVITY MAPS OF SKIN AT ACUPUNCTURE POINTS

From Dr. Robert Becker's The Body *Electric.*

Diplomatic ties were extended to the mainland government about the same time that researchers such as Dr. David Bressler at the University of California at Los Angeles supervised the operation of a pain-control clinic. There he researched the efficacy of acupuncture and postulated explanations of *qi.* Other milestones in exploring the validity of acupuncture, *qi,* and traditional Chinese medicine since Bressler's work include the work of Robert Becker, who was able to chart the field surrounding an acupuncture point and brought respectability to the investigation of traditional Chinese medicine and *qi.* Dr. Becker reported his findings:

> Our readings also indicated that the meridians *were* [emphasis his] conducting current, and its polarity, matching the input side of the two-way system we'd charted in amphibians and showed a flow into the central nervous system. Each point was positive compared to its environs, and each one had a field surrounding it, with its own

> characteristic shape. We even found a fifteen-minute rhythm in the current strength at the points, superimposed on the circadian rhythm we'd found a decade earlier in the overall DC system. It was obvious by then that at least the major parts of the acupuncture charts had, as the jargon goes, "an objective basis in reality.[35]

More recently a Harvard professor of medicine, Dr. David Eisenberg, published *Encounters with Qi: Exploring Chinese Medicine* in 1985.[36] A PBS television special followed.[37]

Obstacles

An obstacle to the transmission of in-depth martial arts knowledge looms today in the West as well as in Taiwan and China: young people, potential inheritors of a system, are often too busy or not interested in in-depth study. It takes many hours of training and more hours of practice to master any martial art, and this is especially true of the internal martial arts. With increasing frequency *MTV*, video games, and similar interests are replacing martial art sweat, dedication, and delayed gratification. Thus, as is most often the case today in the United States as well as China and Taiwan, few students are able and willing to put in the many hours of work and sacrifice required to master the arts.

The transmission of in-depth martial arts knowledge is further hampered by the fact that some of the teachers left who still have this knowledge are resistant to teaching the high-level material. They hold their knowledge as sacrosanct, and students must beg and prove themselves worthy to receive this information. The results are that in many cases teachers have carried their knowledge to the grave. Those of us who believe in keeping the internal martial arts alive must work hard to pass on knowledge so that this information will be available to future generations.

The notion of secrecy

Sometimes the particular way that the Asian martial arts connected mind and body together resulted in legendary powers in the practitioner. In the desire to safeguard this knowledge from the unapproved or unscrupulous, it became customary to protect this information. This gave rise to a tradition of secrecy that surrounded the martial arts of the Far East. Serving a valuable function at one time, secrecy limited access to information by rival groups and individuals.

However, secrecy is no longer as important as it once was. The value of the most masterful sword technique of severing a man's arm from his body is minimal when compared with the destructive potential of automatic firearms. The ability to harmlessly neutralize an attacker by knocking him unconscious


程
天仙直論長生度世內煉丹訣心法九章
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是呼吸之氣亦謂之母氣與子氣也超刼
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Secrets of the internal tradition: This ancient Taoist text from a cut wood-printing block includes coding known only to the initiated. At the points indicated by arrows, the adept would explain the secret meaning of the symbol.

with a slap from the back of a defender's hand is not as easy as employing pepper spray. In contemporary society technology provides easy access to results once attainable only through years of dedication and trust.

Yet the notion of secrecy has not disappeared with modernity. Although there is some justification today, most secrecy is a hindrance to the transmission of complete knowledge. Even today there are some traditionalists who still regard it important to keep secrets from outsiders. This practice is rooted in martial art history in the Far East and was especially prevalent during the grass roots Boxer Rebellion of the turn of the century. For example, it was reported that the late Wang Su-Qin, a well known internal arts master in Taiwan, would only teach those who had been initiated into the *I-Kuan Tao* cult.[38]

In my experience, there have been several times when other teachers, sometimes even extended kung fu "family" members, have approached my teachers and suggested that they not teach me (or at least not teach me in depth) since I was a foreigner. This is reminiscent of the famous story about Bruce Lee in which he was challenged for openly teaching to Westerners; as the story goes, the challenge became physical and Lee had to fight an opposing master. Robert Smith's *Chinese Boxing Masters and Methods,* describes several incidents where knowledge was kept from him. Once one of Smith's masters saw him in a photograph with another teacher and the master stopped teaching him altogether! This illustrates another motive for secrecy: interschool rivalry and jealousy. In Smith's words: "… [the teacher] … had seen a photograph in a Hong Kong magazine of me with Cheng Alan-Ching. Sharing me with a boxer at odds with the entire boxing community was too much for him. This ended our association."[39]

Although the issue is clouded by charlatans who pretend (or imagine themselves) to possess secrets of the martial arts, there are indeed secrets, especially in the internal arts. And there are those who believe that this information should be guarded at all costs. There is, for example, the story of the praying mantis teacher who had been contracted to go to Japan and teach his art. He was assas-

sinated before he could complete his contract. Anyone practicing for a great length of time, especially in earlier periods where information was first available in the West (the 1960s) will have similar stories. To take an example from my own experience, in the mid 1980s I employed an older Chinese man as a teacher of t'ai chi ch'uan who also taught some praying mantis and *suai qiao* (Chinese wrestling). On more than one occasion when I walked through the area where he was conducting an advanced class he abruptly stopped teaching advanced applications *of suai qiao* and began practicing basic drills, carefully guarding his "secret" practice from my eyes.

Many traditions contain esoteric knowledge about the training of internal energy. Secret training methods range from the simple to the bizarre. A teacher once showed me "secret" notes that were nothing more than acupuncture meridians and the traditional circulation pattern of *qi.* It is important to note that special *qi* training methods with strange and unusual practices that promise power should be approached with extreme caution. Many are dangerous to the students' health and should be avoided. This category includes methods of tying weights to one's testicles with the promise of amazing powers both martial and marital. It is amazing indeed to see what one will do in the search for power.

Externalizing *qi: fa qi*

發氣
faqi

One should be cautious about dismissing some amazing stories too quickly. Some feats that may be treated with skepticism by the uninitiated may have been kept secret through many generations and passed down from father to son. One of my teachers, by profession a college professor, is a well-liked, unassuming man who from time to time gives my students a real treat. He performs the amazing feat of concentrating his *qi* and projecting it through his finger, drawing a mark on his torso with his finger six to eight inches away without physical contact! He makes no great display of this and rarely discusses it. This feat was once performed for a newspaper reporter in the United States and I was twice able to record it on videotape. His father and teacher, now in his mid-eighties, visits me in California about once a year and to this day has never discussed it.[40]

My Taiwan acupuncture teacher, a senior uncle of the inner-door family, practices a similar feat. He demonstrates concentrating his *qi* through an acupuncture needle an inch or so away from a patient's skin. Again, without making physical contact, and without the patient watching, he is able to raise a red spot on the patient's skin, sometimes with a visible "pulse."

On a related note, Dr. David Eisenberg, professor of medicine at Harvard University, described his interaction with a Chinese internal energy master in this way:

> In a final demonstration the Qi Gong master took two metal skewers along with a one-pound pork steak which he had brought with him. He put the two skewers through the steak then grabbed the skewers, one in the left hand and one in the right so as to complete an electrical circuit. Having grasped the wires along with the two skewers the circuit was engaged and the pork chop began to smoke and flame. Within minutes there was a medium-well-done pork chop which my Qi Gong friend sliced and offered to serve! I was astounded by this demonstration and have no adequate explanation for why the Qi Gong master did not injure his skin, or cause a serious heart irregularity, seizure or other damage to his own person.[41]

The marvel of *qi*, to varying levels, is being increasingly accepted as a true, not imaginary, phenomenon. We are at the dawn of a new day where, through the knowledge of past masters, we are able to glean insights into mind and body potential. Yet, while keeping an open mind, we must learn to filter information and retain a degree of scrutiny about what is and what is not a valid "*qi* event."

Evaluating *Qi:* Checking for Unconscious Participation

Deciding that *qi* exists as a real and worthwhile pursuit is only part of the problem. Then the student has the difficult task of determining what is indeed a genuine *qi* event. Some guidelines to use when searching for a teacher or for help in developing your own model to explain and examine *qi* may be useful.

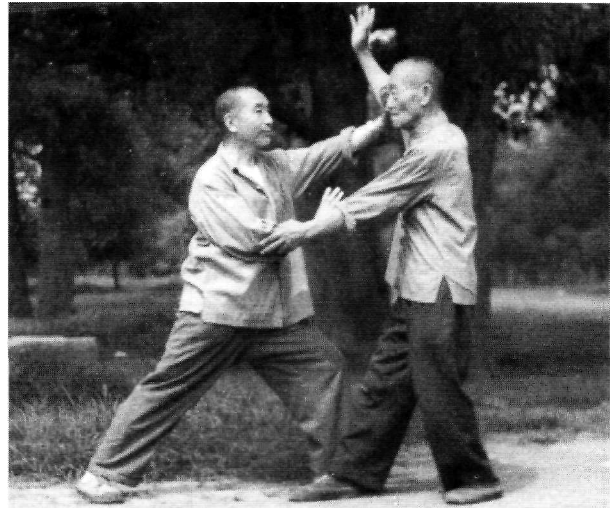
When evaluating *qi* phenomena, consider the unconscious participation in the activity by others. In 1988 while in Beijing, *qi* master Shi Ming attempted to recruit me as a personal student.[42] He demonstrated an ability to resist the force of several students attempting to push and or grab him. He appeared to be able to perform this feat without using or allowing his students to place more than an ounce or two of force on his body; the students appeared to be thrown violently back from what appeared to be little more than a twitch of the master's finger. Students reported feelings like that of an electrical shock as they lost their ability to resist the master. More incredibly, he was also able to throw students without any physical contact while touching them through the medium of a four- or five-inch leaf. The master seemed genuine, his *qi gong* postures seemed valid and his students sincere. However, I decided not to study with him. Something seemed a bit odd since he refused to demonstrate on me or anyone who had not been student for *several years.* Yet the material and the presentation did not seem fraudulent.

What makes evaluating internal energy power demonstrations like those just described difficult is determining the unconscious participation by students in the demonstration. Students, especially those working with *any* teacher for a number of years, will consciously and unconsciously learn to perform as expected. As studied in the science of psychological conditioning, subtle rewards ("see, now you are able to feel the *qi*") follow desired performance. And for the student who doesn't perform as expected, a subtle reprimand ("you must be blocking your *qi")* has a similar effect. Over a period of several years all dedicated students learn, in varying degrees, to perform (without conscious awareness) as expected for the master. Furthermore, conditioning like this can occur without the teacher's conscious awareness that the process is occurring. It is possible to have long-term students thrown around by a sincere teacher pointing a finger. Of course this does not mean that the case of master Shi is necessarily invalid. I only suggest that any *qi* skill involving human interaction be evaluated for the presence of subtle conditioning influences.

CHAPTER THREE

The Arcane, Mysterious, and Symbolic in Ba Gua Zhang

The most difficult concepts to convey in internal martial arts are those recorded in poetic literature and oral tradition from a time, place, and culture far removed from our own. In this chapter we attempt to glean the insights of past Ba Gua masters, preserved in these difficult forms and passed down from master to disciple. This material reflects the transmission of knowledge handed down to Liu Xing-Han by his teacher, "uncles," and "older brothers" in the early years of this century. Much of the material references archaic meanings and Chinese cosmology. What we have attempted is to discern the palatable and the pragmatic from this body of inner door knowledge so as to provide access to esoteric information to Western researchers of Ba Gua and other internal martial arts.



Author Liu (left) practicing Ba Gua with Master Wang Wen-Kuei, 1977.

So as not to distort their meaning, some difficult-to-translate arcane references have been literally translated in this section. These appear as *"italicized text within quotation marks."*

Ba Gua as Taoist Yogic Practice

The previous chapter examined the Taoist yogic roots of Ba Gua Zhang. This chapter looks at the application of Taoist yogic theory and practice to Ba Gua *Zhang* and the internal martial arts.

Tao yin

導引
taoyin

內觀
nei kuan

先天
shen tien

元氣
yuan qi

內功
nei gong

One of the most important discoveries of the ancient Taoists was the direct manipulation of internal *qi.* Other than massage, there are two ways to direct internal *qi:* mental exercise *(nei kuan* or *nei shih)* and manipulation through posture—the grandfather of *qi gong,* an art called *taoyin.^* The Taoist exercises described in Chapter Two were designed to move and guide *qi* and through this process transform the body. Taoist sages believed that by becoming in tune with and balancing *qi,* a harmonious inner environment within the body is created, which reflects the idealized, harmonious universe. Through *taoyin* practice an inner alchemist returned mentally and physically to *shen tien,* a state before the normal decline of birth and death sets in, where balanced *qi* brought him into harmony with the natural order through internal balance and where his *yuan qi,* (primordial *qt)* would be full and uncorrupted. During the Tang (618-906 A.D.) and Sung (960-1279) dynasties these practices became popular within Taoist circles. Manuals describing principles of "nourishing the life force gymnastics" were popular among literati practitioners of Taoist physical yogas. Texts advised that these exercises be done to "render the body more supple and to rest it." The result of these exercises was *nei gong,* skill or mastery of the inner *qi* flow. Elaborate health-therapy systems, probably the oldest and most complete physical therapy system in the premodern world, developed from this body of knowledge.

Physiotherapists of ancient China understood that *qi* moved in the human body like water in a river. When pathways in the body's energy dam up, blockages form and the energy in the body, just like nonmoving water, becomes stagnant. These blockages, according to Taoist inner alchemists and later the traditional Chinese medical doctors, were the primary cause of ill health. Stagnant *qi* was understood to be the cause of joint tension, backache, headaches, high blood pressure, cancer, and stress-related visceral organ dysfunction. Taoist physiotherapy became a standard approach to therapy for centuries, but it wasn't until almost a thousand years later that the science and art of manipulating *qi* would manifest as a primary focus in select martial arts.

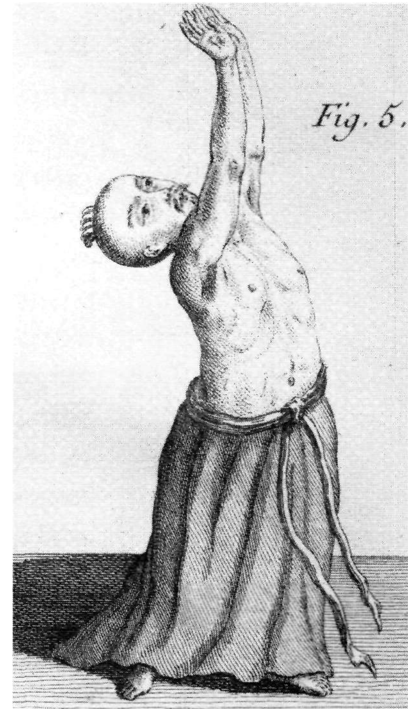
"Who knows where the rivers of internal energy go? In the body great and wide they circulate and collect into ponds, stagnant pools and swamps. In the same way that swamps breed insects, with stagnation in the body, there is disease."

Yogic-based internal martial arts

As described in Chapter Two, Taoist yogic practice merged with martial arts in turn-of-the-century China. This was the genesis of a unique approach to martial arts where mental and physical tools were developed to aid the adept in the experiencing of and merging with the universal principle—die mysterious Tao—and master combat arts in ways never before seen. First among these new martial

arts was Ba Gua Zhang, the coiling, twisting, and turning of which became the ultimate psycho-physical yoga of nature and life. *"More than memorizing and practicing moves, Ba Gua Zhang is about life."*

Does mysterious inner power exist? Does it reach its greatest potential when matched with meditative trance? What happens when you combine meditative trance with special movements that "mimic the sky?" (in ancient Chinese thought heaven was round and earth square). These were the questions that obsessed the Dragon Gate Taoist sect to which Dong Hai-Chuan, the founder of Ba Gua Zhang, belonged. Practitioners of the Dragon Gate believed that one could induce a special mental state by walking a circle while chanting and practicing breathing exercises. They believed that through this practice they developed a special connection to the mysterious universal principle, and that this connection resulted in special power and knowledge. Everything was in place for the Ba Gua Zhang martial art to develop.



Drawing of a Taoist yogi taken from an ancient text.

Variant curricula

Most martial artists at the turn of the century had little if any education. On the whole most pugilists, and this includes those practicing Ba Gua, were illiterate common laborers who were not interested in the deeper meanings of yogic practice. Typically they studied martial arts to acquire employable skills with the aim of becoming a bodyguard. Those who did bring deeper thought to bear on their martial arts, particularly in Beijing and Tien Jin, were a relatively small number of literate martial artists in the cultural centers of northern China during the late 1800s and the early 1900s. This small number of researchers, including Liu Bin (see page xvii) and Sun Lu-Tang (see pages 18-19), were going to impact the arts in significant ways. It is interesting to look at parallel development occurring in T'ai Chi Ch'uan during the same period. Douglas Wile has made an extensive examination of the historicity of the Yang style. In discussing Ch'en Hsin's writings made between 1908 and 1919 he called it "the only work comparable in the scope and detail of its medical, metaphysical, and meditational content." Wile's analysis includes an extensive discussion on the possible nexus that produced the T'ai Chi "Forty Chapters" mix of martial arts, medicine and meditation which has become synonymous with internal martial arts.[44] "In the case of Ba Gua as in select T'ai Chi and Hsing I circles, a genre of martial-intellectuals emerged who sought to merge their art with ultimate principles of health and life. They developed ideas that supported a grand philosophy congruent with their martial art merging with Taoist yogic practices.

Ba Gua as transformational art

内家
nei chia

What the intellectuals of Ba Gua and other internal martial arts sought most was to become *nei chia,* internalists. The internalist, through yogic practice, played upon inherently opposite forces of yin and yang in the body to bring human potential to fruition. Through yogic art he transformed himself and enhanced physical and mental functions. Through disciplined practice, in the words of Master Liu Bin, the adept *"discovered himself and saw the phenomenon of sky, earth, sun, moon, wind and clouds in new ways."* This path of training is available to the martial artist today. According to instructions handed down from past masters, with patience, hard work and a little luck the student *"penetrates the veil and directly perceives the yin and yang of the etheric world."* It is said that *"to understand Ba Gua Zhang is to understand the principles of life ... one becomes in tune with nature, spirit and man."* With self-actualization as a by-product of training, a person is imbued with increased insight and sensitivity to the flow and energy of life.

眞人
chen ren

Through yogic practice the internal martial art master transformed and linked mind and internal energy to the "higher" or "natural" self to become a *chun tzu,* a sage, what the Taoists called a *chen ren,* a "true man" of Tao. The natural order was perceived to be perfect. Taoist yogis and mystics, seeking to identify themselves with this perfect order, first had to disidentify from their own ego. Only through the complete abandonment of self could a man become a sage, take away the artificial and unnatural trappings of man, and possibly conquer death. The power over death, of "rhinoceroses having no place to thrust their horn" and "no place for death to enter" could only be accomplished when the ego was abandoned and the man physically, mentally, and spiritually identified with natural order.[45] In 300 B.C., the preeminent Taoist writer, Chuang Tzu, discussed the "true man" in this way:

> What do I mean by the True Man? The True Man of ancient time did not rebel against want, did not grow proud in plenty, and did not plan his affairs. A man like this could commit an error and not regret it, could meet with success and not make a show. A man like this could climb the high places and not be frightened, could enter the water and not get wet, could enter the fire and not get burned. His knowledge was able to climb all the way up to the Way like this.
>
> The True Man of ancient time slept without dreaming and woke without care; he ate without savoring and his breath came from deep inside. The True Man breathes with his heels; the mass of men breathe with their throat. Crushed and bound down they gasp out their words

> as though they were retching. Deep in their passions and desires, they are shallow in the workings of Heaven.[46]

The yogic-practitioner, through the practice of *nei tan* yogic internal Ba Gua, sought to become a true man through the process of becoming a model in miniature (microcosm) of the larger model (macrocosm). This is the basic premise of applied Taoistic proto-science, a paradigm that sees man as mirroring the power and flow of creation. Physical exercise, actions of thought, and the way one breathes all affected one's relationship with creation. One's actions either brought one away from the natural flow of life and toward death or toward natural order and life. This was the design of Ba Gua, to mirror the harmonious flow of creation's forces and reflect this vital ebb and flow in the movement of Ba Gua: the turning, twisting, and "change" of the art. To some the art became mystical practice, illustrated by the way they described their art: *"the true Ba Gua turn is more than only a turn, it is the movement of 'creation within creation.'"*

The merging of mysticism with physical practice created experiences that were difficult to describe. Enigmatic, paradoxical expressions were adopted to describe the experience of the martial-yogi. For example, the art was said to be *"still when moving* and *"in movement still."* Like the discipline of the Sufi dancers, the movement of the art is said to change the consciousness of the practitioner.

Mountain-dwelling Taoists

Of the well-known martial arts it is often said that only Ba Gua is purely of Taoist origin.[47] Dong himself said that he learned his art from a "mountain Taoist." Historical records show that there were mountain Taoists and that they practiced martial arts along with special energetic methods, meditation, and Taoist yogas in the search for physical immortality and union with the Tao. Aspirants left civilization behind to live in these remote locations where they were free to practice esoteric health and mind-training regimens. To get a glimpse into the influence mountain Taoists had on Dong it is useful to examine the life and practices of these Spartan highlanders. In *The Secret and Sublime*, noted Sinologist John Blofeld describes his meetings with Taoist holy sages and recluses in the mountains of China before the 1949 communist takeover of the mainland. Below is an account of Taoists in mock battle he observed one evening while a guest at a Taoist hermitage:

> The climax of the evening was a combat between two pairs of recluses armed with swords. Dark robes billowing in the wind, sleeves flapping like phoenix-wings, they ran and leapt, cut and thrust with such agility that their weapons darting in the moonlight produced spurts

> of liquid fire. The clash of steel on steel and the flurry of sparks proclaimed that the great swords were no toys; it seemed impossible that the contestants would emerge unwounded from an encounter fierce enough for me to expect to see heads and limbs sundered from their bodies. The blows were not feints, but dealt in earnest in the sure knowledge that the opposing adepts had the speed and skill to protect themselves by parrying or swift avoidance. The combat had the aspect of a frenzied ritual in which the contestants were determined to die beneath one another's swords. By the time it ended, I was sweating with anxiety and could scarcely believe my eyes when the four recluses walked towards the Abbot smiling and unscathed.[48]

高手
gaoshou

This may very well have been the type of experience that influenced Dong Hai-Chuan. It was an experience of martial expertise, what he would have called *gao shou* (masterful) replete with lightness, great skill, and inward peace reflected in physical form and Taoist practice. In the same text quoted above, Blofeld questioned the Abbot of the monastery about the relationship of Taoist spirituality to martial arts and mental training. His answer is germane:

> This principle of voidness and passivity must be carried over into all affairs. As Lao Tzu says: 'He who excels in combat is one who does not let himself be roused.' That the warriors of old flocked to our peaceful hermitages to foster their martial skills is no paradox; they came to learn how to apply the secret of emptiness, how to ensure that the enemy's sword, though aimed at flesh, encounters void, and how to destroy the foe by striking with dispassion. Hatred arouses wrath; wrath breeds excitement; excitement leads to carelessness which, to a warrior, brings death. A master swordsman can slay ten enemies besetting him simultaneously, by virtue of such dispassion that he is able to judge to perfection how to dodge their thrusts. A swordsman or an archer's aim is surest when his mind, concentrated on the work in hand, is indifferent to failure or success. *Stillness in the heart of movement is the secret of all power,* [emphasis added]

Traditional Chinese theories merge with martial arts

In the same way that the recluse Taoist swordsmen demonstrated attunement to the natural order, so did select Chinese intellectuals in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries seek to organize the internal martial systems in ways that would be congruent with the hidden workings of the universe. When these intellectuals became involved in the martial arts they sought to organize

程德喜
Chen De-Xi

劉興漢
Liu Xing-Han

王文奎
Wang Wen-Kuei

高子英
Gao Zi-Ying

王榮堂
Wang Rong-Tang

楊 昆
Yang Kim

司 珍
Si Zben

元 *yuan*

元氣 *yuan qi*

the martial systems in ways that would be congruent with what they perceived to be secret natural principles. They assumed that this secret knowledge had the power to place man in union with Tao, and that this union could make the boxer unbeatable. The ultimate goal was the same as that of yogis, namely, to become the microcosm that reflects the macrocosm.

Ba Gua Zhang was created in the late 1800s when there was rapid growth of martial art styles in China. During that period of Chinese history the common experience was the futility of life. This became fertile ground for those opting for means to transcend the bitterness and oppression of the mundane. Martial arts, particularly those promising mystical and secret power, became especially popular. The time period was that of the Boxer Rebellion, a difficult-to-control wildfire that sprang up as a grassroots popular movement at the turn of the century. Many boxer groups formed secret societies that linked spiritual practices, mysticism, and magic with martial arts. A style of the period with wide appeal must have had a grand and mystical name, premise, and secret methodology. Ba Gua Zhang had a perfect name. Better yet, it was linked to mysterious mountain-dwelling Taoists and secret Taoist cults.

Yin-Yang and Chinese Cosmology

Chinese philosophy and Ba Gua

The main objective of a Taoist yogi-intellectual-martial artist, as has been discussed, would be to unify with the primal forces *(yuan)* of the universe and restore *the yuan qi,* the "primordial *qi*" within his own body. To understand the thinking of a Taoist yogi at the turn of the century, one must first look at how he viewed the world.



In one of their first open meetings in a decade, this photo of senior Ba Gua masters was taken after the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1976. Senior Ba Gua Zhang Research Association members from left in front: Chen De-Xi, author Liu, Wang Wen-Kuei. Gao Zi-Ying, Wang Rong-Tang. Back row:Yang Kun and Si Zhen

According to classic Chinese philosophers, we as human beings are the result *"of the marriage between heaven and earth."* We are a microcosm, a universe in miniature, and minor model of the larger model, the macrocosm. Literati in the internal martial arts spared no effort to reconcile theories of the universal principle with specific martial practice.

The micro-macrocosm philosophy of the ancient Taoist philosophers states that we are *"children of the earth."* Internal alchemists believed that this was more than just philosophy, but that the practice of Taoist yoga linked them with and reflected their connection to nature. They believed that the phenomenological world, if understood, could be manipulated. As many alchemist-yogi practitioners saw it, the best avenue for understanding the phenomenon of creation was with

the blueprint of the universe, and the basic coding symbols of the / *Ching,* the trigrams.

The trigram (Diagram on page 43), as the name suggests, is a three-line drawing. The three (yin broken, or yang solid) lines are delineated as a heaven line at top, a human realm line in the middle, and an earth line at the bottom. There are eight of these that form the Ba Gua talisman. The trigrams represent the phenomenological world. The Taoists and Confucianists studied them in the same way an engineer of today's time studies formulas to construct a bridge structural support system. Just as numbers are symbols that represent the outside physical reality to the engineer, Taoist alchemists used the trigrams to develop a proto-science that they believed would uncover the secrets of life hidden by nature. In their search for these formulas, the most popular trigram interactions were the trigrams *K'an*

(☵), yang within yin, and *Li*
(☲), yin within yang.

In alchemical terms, the interaction of these trigrams represented *Kan's* "true lead" merging with *Li's* "true mercury." A typical example of the importance of the trigram coding, this formula not only was allegorical of the search for the secret elixir of life in the alchemist's furnace, but was extrapolated beyond the furnace to acquire yogic and bedchamber meanings.

The symbolism of the trigrams was very important to the alchemists of ancient China. This suggests that the trigrams and the / *Ching,* one of the oldest books in Chinese culture and an in-depth study of trigram arrangement, may have been important to the philosophers/martial artist/yogis as they developed the martial art of Ba Gua.

Ba Gua Zhang and the I Ching

No discussion of Ba Gua *Zhang* could be complete without some treatment of the art's relationship to the *I Ching.* Dating from the earliest records of the Chinese written language, the / *Ching* or *Book of Changes* has been revered as holding keys to the universe. Although this treatise is used for philosophical reflection and/or divination, it also is considered by many Ba Gua experts, especially during the turn of the century, as holding secrets of deeper and mysterious roots of Ba Gua Zhang practice.

Students of the / *Ching* know that the classic is based upon an arrangement of yin and yang binary coded lines, the trigrams discussed above, placed together in series of three (each forming eight *guas* or line arrangements); these series of eight

guas, from which the Ba Gua Zhang name comes, then interplay among themselves to create sixty-four (eight x eight) arrangements of eight yin and yang line diagrams.

The binary codings of the / *Ching* and the Ba Gua diagram have many correspondences to Ba Gua Zhang martial art practice. In most styles the sixty-four changes of the / *Ching* have been adapted into or closely associated with the sixty-four palms (movements) of Ba Gua Zhang.

In the same way that the Ba Gua diagram and the / *Ching* mirrored mysterious universal principles, the art of Ba Gua *Zhang* was believed by its practitioners to mirror the principles of creation through movements corresponding to the philosophical ethos. Central to this ethos is the idea that the universe gives birth to phenomena through change and interplay of bipolar opposing forces of yin and yang.

The Chinese philosophy of yin yang, a separate school until 200 B.C., viewed phenomena in the universe as mixtures of yang (positive/charged) and yin (negative/receptive) "mechanisms of change." In seasonal terms, the classic example of yang is high summer, while winter represents extreme yin. However, just as the year goes by and summer gradually changes to winter, all phenomena are seen as gradations of yin and yang.

化機
mechanisms of change

Modern interpretations of yin-yang

A modern scientific-based interpretation of this principle includes the neuroreceptor sites in one's brain activated by positive and negative electro-magnetic interplay. Positive-negative electrical changes govern nervous signals sent from one's brain by which bodily actions such as digestion occurs; again an example of a process brought about by bipolar electrical change. Other examples are the positive to negative electro-chemical reactions that produce changes in plants' photochemical cell reactions from day to night and electro-chemical reactions that accompany the growth and development of bones (brought about by piezoelectrical charges). Thus electro-magnetism (the interplay of bi-polar electromagnetic forces against each other) are basic to life processes and can be understood in terms of yin and yang.

When bipolar opposing principles are incorporated into the martial arts they deepen practice and provide for efficient movement within and external to the body. Since Dong Hai-Chuan's time, many have believed that study of the ultimate principles of the internal martial arts will be impeded if not understood through the bipolar laws of yin and yang.



American Ba Gua student Dave Phelps studies the "lotus palm" with "Uncle" Yang. Temple of Heaven Park, Beijing, China 1994.

The positive/ negative binary coding of yin and yang and how this applies to Ba Gua martial arts

There are many ways to understand yin and yang in the martial arts. The ideal human model, where forces of yin and yang are most balanced, is the healthy infant who physiologically reflects the optimal merging of these forces. Separation and division between these forces brings about growth, since growth requires yin and yang to oppose: Where the extreme merging of yin and yang equals birth, the extreme division of yin and yang is death. According to the *Tao Te Ching,* the ultimate bible of the Taoists, balanced "softness" is equated with the life force and "stiffness" (extreme hardness) results in death. Life energy, when hard and without softness, is unable to express power. Blood vessels provide an apt analogy: when soft, they transfer vital fluid, but they become brittle and vulnerable to arterial disease when hardened by plaque; yet when too soft they may burst, and if in the brain, causing cerebral hemorrhage. Soft and hard merge to create the youthful body. The perfect yin-yang balance is the goal for the martial artist. A true master moves like a young tiger, with fluidity both soft and hard and unquestionably powerful. The image of an accomplished internal master is the effortlessness and powerfulness of a predatory cat. An internal master moves with neither unyielding stiffness nor limp lifelessness but with an effective grace that brings *sung,* (coiling, loose and wiry) power to fruition that is *gang rou shen gi,* a balance of hardness and softness.[10] A true internal master has no need for hand- or body-hardening exercises (a throwback to pre-Taoist yogic martial arts). Instead he practices *mien ch'uan* (cotton palm).

鬆
sung

剛柔相濟
gang rou shen gi

綿拳
mien ch 'nan

Yin-Yang in internal power

Just described is the principle of the yin and yang in motion. In internal martial arts this is the unity of calm and action. (Calm + action = internal power). Yin is the calm aspect of movement; yang is the active aspect. According to ancient philosophical views of the law of the universe, nothing can be outside the law of yin and yang.

Although perennially tending toward opposition, when yin and yang are unified, there is power. Consider the example of an electrical motor, its power formed through an electrical charge that causes magnetic resistance and ensuing

movement. An electric motor turns because the magnets resist and push against their polar opposite. Like a quiet motor that generates immense power with little detectable activity from the outside, the martial artist who brings yin and yang close to unity generates combat-effective internal power without outwardly appearing powerful.

Reflected in this martial system one extreme is calm, the other is movement, and the cycle between activity and stillness governs all life. *"Before movement there is calm, however, this calm carries with it the intent to move.*" The paradox of Taoist internal yoga as applied to mastery in the martial arts, is that *"even when you are moving you are still"* and *"when still you are in motion.*" The paradoxical merging of activity and stillness is the expression of the interplaying opposites of yin and yang that lie at the heart of Taoist yogic practice. *"The person who can understand this secret and incorporate it into practice is on the road to becoming a highly skilled internal martial artist.*"

The Ba Gua body

"The value of the exercise lies in exercising the full radius of the curve of every joint." Expressed in the West by the idea of "use it or lose it," Ba Gua is the ideal exercise, adapting the principle of Chinese medicine, which teaches that "a moving door harbors no worm." In the maintenance of health it is essential to strengthen the muscles and open the energetic pathways so that the meridians and joints are fully exercised. This concept is not limited to just one part of one range of muscle movement, but applies to every curve of every bone, as the full movement of every joint is maintained. Of the martial arts, only Ba Gua provides this type of full body exercise. *"With regular Ba Gua exercise there is an increased chance to have health and well-being into your later years.*" Ba Gua via its coiling, turning, and twisting promotes the movement of the internal rivers of blood and *qi;* increased circulation supplies blood to the nerves and promotes strength, well-being, and an enhanced immune response.

Righteous qi: the development of inner and outer balance

Chinese yoga and internal martial arts are holistic. Lacking the concept of mind-body dichotomy that has become the cornerstone of Western scientific development, the Taoist philosophers of ancient times intuited that mind influences thought which influences the body and, likewise, that the body influences the mind. Although the language and underlying philosophy differs, Western medical science is now beginning to agree with this philosophy. The ancient Taoists



Liu Men-Gen teaches American Dave Phelps Ba Gua sensitivity drills.

劉敏庚
Liu Men-Gen

正氣
zheng qi (cheng ch'i)

understood energetic flow and balance, and through this philosophical outlook they understood the importance of body and mind balance. The Western view looks at the person as a conglomeration of the nervous system, brain function, and neuro-receptor sites, and until recently has downplayed the role of emotional state and stress on the body. Increasingly Western scientists understand the impact of emotion through thought in the cerebral cortex and emotional centers of the brain and the good and bad impact that these processes have on digestion, the immune system and various other aspects of mind-body health. The Taoists called the balance of mind-body health *"zheng qi"*

Zheng qi (also written *cheng ch* V) is often translated as "moral righteousness" (literally "righteous *qi"),* however there is a specific meaning for practitioners of physical arts, and particularly internal martial artists. The common translation of *zheng qi* has to do with the development of strong character and is consistent with the development of social consciousness and a prosocial lifestyle. Classically, *zheng qi* occurs when one is "in harmony with the principles of heaven and earth." This definition applies to physical discipline in the sense of "correct practice" or "appropriate practice." It is said that *"Ba Gua practice nourishes* zheng qi." What this means is that correct *qi* practice will not hurt your back or injure your health in other ways. When you attain a sufficient level of *zheng qi,* illness will be minor and you will seldom have any health problems. It became common knowledge that practicing with one's back leaning too forward, hunched over, or chest stuck out may be injurious to one's health because of poor *zheng qi.*

"These are the true domains of Ba Gua Zhang. It is more than a martial art, it is a high ait of transformation and mastery." It becomes moving meditation, and a "way for one to look at the wonders of creation. In practice of the art seek out the sublime meaning underlying the guas, for they have the potential to radically change your life."

Taoist terms in the martial arts

When the literati took it upon themselves to organize the internal martial arts, they spared no effort to reconcile universal principles with the physical arts and incorporated cosmological terms into their disciplines. There are numerous examples where Taoist and Confucian universal principles were applied to the martial arts. Below is a listing of key and repeated themes in internal martial art literature.

According to ancient Chinese cosmology, creation began with *Wuji*, "the void or chaos" that divided into yin and yang from which ***t'ai*** *chi* or the phenomenological world came about (see diagram). When analyzed as a series of line symbols representing yin and yang, these symbols analyze phenomenological events as a merging of an upper "heaven"

A TRIGRAM

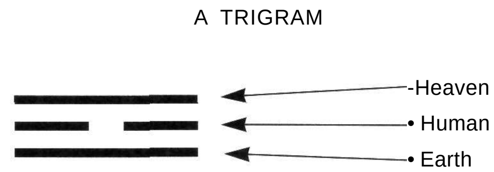
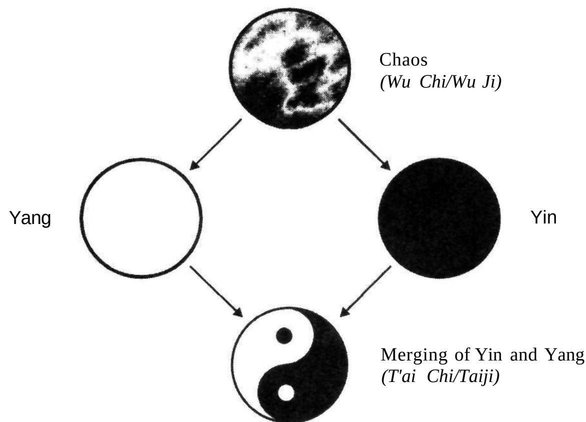


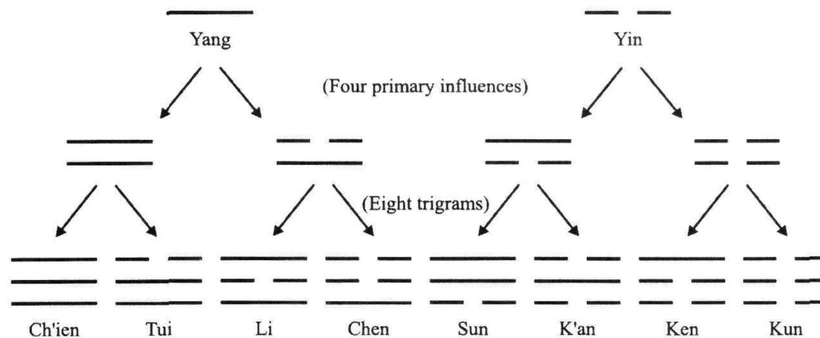
Diagram I

The Development of the Phenomenological World

Pictorial representation:



Representation in trigram codification:



Arranged in a classical manner, shown below is a representation of the trigrams in the "earlier heaven" arrangement:



Diagram 2

YIN AND YANG IN BA GUA PRACTICE

(Note: This cryptic instruction was handed down to Liu Xing-Han from Liu Bin and Gi Feng-Jeng.)

*Ba Gua is not only physical movement, but a state and quality of mind. Understand the turning palm to be the core ofBa Gua practice and, beyond the eight guas and their changes, the ninth circle or "palace" to be the center of the secret.**

"Palm in" is yin, "palm out" is yang. Moving outward is yang, moving inward is yin, moving up is yang, moving down is yin. Train yin and yang to move in coordinated ways. This is the theory of Ba Gua Zhang.

*The ninth circle refers to a method of practicing Ba Gua where instead of a single circle, nine circles are utilized, normally being arranged in a specific grouped pattern. This method is the result of application of a cosmological pattern to Ba Gua Zhang. See Diagram on page 45.

line with a middle human line and a lower "earth" line (see Diagram). A series of eight three-line diagrams form trigrams which are called the ba gua trigrams.

Mental, Emotional, and Spiritual Principles

The mind and internal power

内三合
Net San He

The *nei san he* (literally "three inner relationships") principle identifies and describes the relationship of cognitive and emotional factors involved in the manifestation and expression of internal power. This principle suggests internal power occurs not as accidental happenstance, nor as an exclusive byproduct of physical training, but as a process of human consciousness. It is traditionally depicted as a formula involving two aspects of the mind: thought and will. It suggests that these aspects of human consciousness are responsible for the creation, control and delivery of internal power. The traditional formula is shown here:

心
Shin, the mind

THOUGHT (MIND/COGNITION EMOTION)	+	WILL (INTENT/FOCUS)	=	INTERNAL POWER (MANIFESTATION/DIRECTION OF INTERNAL POWER)

意
intent

This formula is an attempt to explain complex human emotional and cognitive factors involved in the manifestation and delivery of internal power. In many ways it is far ahead of its time. For example, it suggests that the mind and the emotion interact with a person's biology to make a change brought about by the conscious intent of the person. It was only very recently that Western science regarded this—the potential impact of one's mental and emotional state on biology—as a possibility. The formula describes the development of *qi*, internal power as originating from the mind and emotions, and then becoming focused and delivered by the will in the same way as a lens focuses a laser beam's light.

The flow

Some ways of organizing thought processes are superior to others. In the case of the art of Ba Gua Zhang, the optimal attainment occurs when thought processes "achieve harmony with the Tao" to create power, or *te*. As previously discussed, traditional Taoist belief is that man is a microcosm, a miniature

te

TERM	PHILOSOPHICAL MEANING	MARTIAL ARTS ADOPTION
Wu Ji (Void)	Chaos before creation	Standing exercise/first move in T'ai Chi
Taiji/T'ai Chi	Grand Principle	Ch'uan(boxing) added to term to give name to martial art
Five elements	Five symbols of creative and destructive forces in the universe	Basic movements in Xing yi
Ba Gua	Eight points of analysis/"Eight trigrams" in Taoist and Confucian cosmology	Sequence and names of the "eight guas." Standard names of the eight basic forms in most styles of Ba Gua martial art.

representation of the larger universal model. Optimal power for man occurs when he ego-disidentifies and becomes "in flow" or in harmony with the Tao. Taoist sages thought that the highest power naturally occurs without effort or individuated ego. Consider the following translation of Chapter thirty-eight of the *Tao Te Ching:*

> The Highest power *(te)* is not powerful
> (not trying to be powerful), therefore has true power.
> Lower power is always (trying to be) powerful,
> therefore never (attains) power.[51]

The subject of "flow" experience has been discussed in recent psychological literature. Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi, in *Beyond Boredom and Anxiety,* argues that "flow" is the subjective experience intrinsic to "autotelic" activities (behaviors deeply enjoyable in and of themselves, functioning as their own end). He measured a wide range of life-centered activities and reports of performers such as surgeons, dancers, rock climbers, and chess players being optimally functional when in the "flow state."

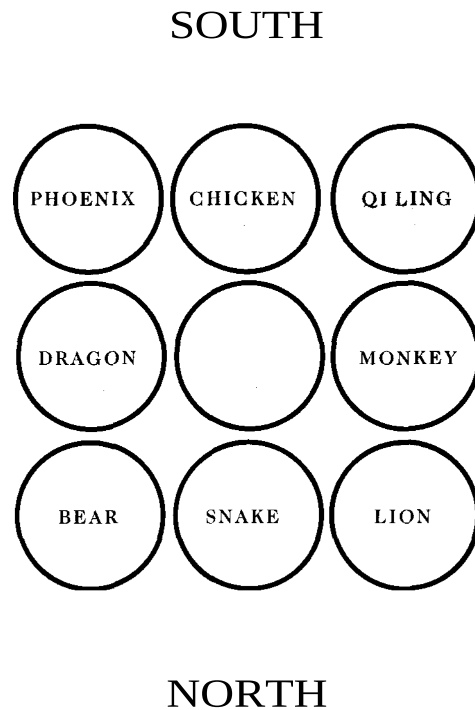


Diagram 3

> All flow experiences are not the same, but they do appear to share a common structural dimension_First, flow involves *a focused and ordered state of consciousness,* described by one of the rock climbers as "one-pointedness of mind." The person focuses complete attention on the event or activity.... Consciousness is highly structured and organized as the information that the mind deals with appears at an optimum level for comprehension.[52]

This optimal state may have been what the Taoists intuited 2,500 years ago as *wu wei* or nonaction. Non-ego-based action and lack of self-awareness or self-consciousness, of losing oneself in activity, may produce an optimal state that

leads to higher levels of functioning. In the example of the rock climber it might be argued that the rock climber is so consumed in the moment that he loses awareness of himself and becomes super-efficient. This model gives us insight into an ideal mental state for internal martial art practice and would explain the emergence of concepts of mind and mental processes appearing in relevant texts at the time when internal martial arts were first written about at the turn of the century. In fact, flow experience may be the most essential key to understanding internal martial arts, the mental state being one of the most important aspects in defining this new category of pugilistic study. It is germane to consider one rock climber's report quoted in Csikszentmihalyi's book:

> You're moving in harmony with something else … it's the Zen feeling, like meditation or concentration. You can get your ego mixed up with climbing in all sorts of ways and it isn't necessarily enlightening. But when things become automatic, it's like an egoless thing… somehow the right thing is done without you ever thinking about it.

Inducement of the flow state seems to be related to the intensity or urgency that particular situations encourage. For example, the surgeon is dealing with a life-threatening situation, as is a rock climber. Any performer, be it on stage or on a football field, is under considerable pressure to perform and is therefore in an intense state of mind. This added importance brings an element of reality and "being completely in the moment," which aids the concentration and focus of attention. Hence, if we can manage to capture and include that same mental direction in the practice of Ba Gua Zhang, we will be transcending and heightening the movements of a true art form.

Most professional athletes who have studied their performances' peaks and valleys know that self-absorbed thought in the midst of performance limits higher performance. Taoists believed that freedom from ego-based thinking was essential for attainment of the ultimate. Every thought produces neurochemical reactions in the brain that are potentially counterproductive if sent as "nervous" or "tension" signals to distal muscle groups. Disidentification with the ego may allow a unified mental process to occur that produces a more enhanced mode of functioning. Such optimal functioning may result from yet to be fully understood neuro-chemical patterns and related thought processes that are a by-product of ego-disidentification. For example, consider interviews with great athletes. When describing a great play or incredible performance, they often report "not being aware" or that they were "an observer" of their activity at the height of their greatest play. This is a common example of ego-disidentification in sports. Mental surrender like this applies to Ba Gua Zhang

practice and may facilitate optimal neuro-psychological functioning. This is spoken of in Taoist texts as "giving up" any attempt to prioritize the mind, de-emphasizing the importance of knowledge, and instead harmonizing with the Tao. Chuang Tzu, in 300 B.C., wrote:

> Your mind has a limit, but knowledge has none. If you use what is limited to pursue what has no limit, you will be in danger. If you understand this and still strive for knowledge you will be in danger for certain![53]

On the subject of letting go and attuning one's mind and spirit with the Tao, Chuang Tzu's famous story of Cook Ting is often used as an allegory for martial arts mastery:

> Cook Ting was cutting up an ox for Lord Wen-Hui. At every touch of his hand, every heave of his shoulder, every move of his feet, every thrust of his knee—zip! zoop! He slithered the knife along with a zing, and all was in perfect rhythm, as though he was performing the dance of the Mulberry Grove or keeping time with Ching-shou music.
>
> "Ah, this is marvelous!" said Lord Wen-Hui. "Imagine skill reaching such heights!"
>
> Cook Ting laid down his knife and replied, "What I care about is the Way, which goes beyond skill. When I first began cutting up oxen, all I could see was the ox itself. After three years I no longer saw the whole ox. And now—now I go at it by spirit and don't look with my eyes. Perception and understanding have come to a stop and spirit moves where it wants. I go along with the natural makeup, strike in the big hollows, guide the knife through the big openings, and follow things as they are. So I never touch the smallest ligament or tendon, much less a main joint."[54]

On discussing the spiritual state of mind and the martial arts, Eugene Herrigel, in the classic *Zen in the Art of Archery,* writes:

> This state, in which nothing definite is thought, planned, striven for, desired, or expected, which aims in no particular direction and yet knows itself capable alike of the possible and impossible, so unswerving is its power—this state, which is at bottom

APPREHENDING THE SECRET MEANING OF A GUA.

(Note: Another cryptic instruction handed down to Liu Xing-Han from Liu Bin and Gi Feng-Jeng.)

The secret underlying creation is in the blueprint of the Ba Gua diagram.With diligent practice, strong dedication, and will, the underlying concept of a Gua will suddenly be revealed. It is a mystical experience of the interconnectedness of life. To touch this, the student "takes a step beyond the normal human realm of existence and experiences a different way of knowing."

> purposeless and egoless, was called by the Master truly "spiritual." It is in fact charged with spiritual awareness and is therefore also called "right presence of mind." This means that the mind or spirit is present everywhere, because it is nowhere attached to any particular place. And it can remain present because, even when related to this or that object, it does not cling to it by reflection and thus lose its original mobility. Like water filling a pond, which is always ready to flow off again, it can work its inexhaustible, power because it is free, and be open to everything because it is empty. This state is essentially a primordial state, and its symbol, the empty circle, is not empty of meaning for him who stands within it.[55]

"To master Ba Gua is to master the soul." Mastery of the soul leads to a deep understanding of the universe. It is thought that Ba Gua martial art derives from the / *Ching.* In this vein, the twentieth hexagram *kuan,* as translated here by Richard Wilhelm, addresses the mindset of the sage and is apropos: "It enables them to apprehend the mysterious and divine laws of life, and by means of profoundest inner concentration they give expression to these laws in their own persons. Thus a hidden spiritual power emanates from them, influencing and dominating others without their being aware of how it happens."[56]

The Four Precious Methods

Prelude

To master others requires mere physical force, but to master oneself requires true strength.

Tao Te Ching

Note: This material has been handed down from master to master, often in an oral tradition, much of the time being represented in a poetic form using archaic Chinese meanings and references. Therefore, translation of some sections for the modern Westerner is an approximation.

There are four precious methods. They are called "precious" because they encapsulate principles that teach not only valuable self-defense skills, but develop solid foundations from which to master the mind and internal energy. Below are rules common to the four precious methods, followed by summaries of their practice.

天心法

tien shin fa

I. "Tien Shin Fa" the sky and heart method (also translated as "heaven and mind method")

Mind and body integration when under attack

Protect the head, heart, and central body. When tense and under pressure it is natural for a man to want to protect himself. In the untrained person this breeds



Ba Gua disciples Liu Fu-Sheng and Xu Sheng-Li practicing weapon arts.



Author Liu and Lyang Ke-Quan discussing ancient texts of Ba Gua Zhang.

panic, producing a disturbed *qi* and *shen* (spirit) and resulting in freezing up; the person is unable to move optimally in the situation. In Chinese internal martial arts this freezing up is called *"overprotectingyour spirit."* It is the response of an animal about to fall victim to a predator. The would-be prey defeats its own power by being scared past the point where he is able to counter or escape. This is due to the mind *"overconcentrating on itself and disabling the spirit."* When this happens there is loss of "root" and center. Mastery of the mind with disciplined calmness can overcome this problem. Learn to keep a calm, settled, collected state of mind that is maintained even when under attack. This allows the mind to work together with the body to attain maximum efficiency, synchronized movement, and ultimately manifestation of internal power.

劉福慶
Liu Fu-Sheng

徐勝利
Xu Sheng-Li

When the *tien shin* method is successfully incorporated into the martial artist's mindset it will not matter from which direction the opponent attacks. Defend yourself with the "back of your arms." This means that you protect yourself with

Rules of the Four Precious Methods

RULE I When attacking or moving forward, do not make rash advancing moves.

RULE 2 Observe how the opponent sets up for his strike and learn to spot how he telegraphs his intentions.[57]

RULE 3 Protect the body's weak points, including pressure points and areas where the nerves are vulnerable.

RULE 4 When counterattacking, do not release power wildly, but with proper control and focus. Remember to be conservative; do not waste energy all at once in a single burst of desperation.



Using the arms as protective shields and sensors. Two senior Ba Gua masters Yang Yong-Li and Cheng Gwo-Hua practice in Beijing.

楊永利
Yang Yong-Li

陳國華
Cheng Gwo-Hua

外三合
wai san he

your arms moving balanced and strong, not locked, but tenacious as a tensed coil of spring. An interconnected relationship exists between each joint so that the three joints of the arm are not moved separately. Thus, movement will not look mechanical but snake-like, with "tentacles" (moving arms) covering your openings.

An important part of the usage of the "back of the arms" strategy is that you are exposing the part of the arm that is least vulnerable to serious damage. The inside of the arm is more susceptible to serious injury since it is the corridor for major arteries and nerves. A strike to the outside would be less serious than one to the inside.

The second part of this lesson involves learning, when in physical contact with the opponent, to sense and read subtle variations in the pressure of his arm on yours and, at more advanced levels, even his intent. The opponent's intent becomes manifest with the lightest of contact by the opponent's arms or torso with the arms. Thus, it is said that your arms should have "eyes of their own." (This concept is demonstrated extensively in the drills shown in Chapter Five). Movement should be agile and limbs must move in an integrated way with respect to each other. This is part of what is called the *wai san he* or "three outside relationships," a basic principle of internal martial arts.[58]

Notes on strategy:

1. Never go beyond the point of efficiency in the heat of combat; allow offensive and defensive movements to define their own natural parameters, and never overextend movements. When facing an opponent in close combat, move with small steps, about one third out (compared to stance base) while keeping weight on the feet centered and back. The applicator of this technique will be more difficult to strike or "take down." Be careful not to move the hands and feet out of balance with the legs, for to do so will open the body to attack.
2. Learn to move to areas that the opponent has exposed: for example, when the opponent strikes from above, the defender strikes from below. Stick to these principles and the first step will be mastered.

2. "Spirit closure and spirit movement" method

Dual principles of solid protective posturing and agile maneuverability

"Closure" is when the defender protects himself by "closing openings." In combat, it is the art of protecting weak and vulnerable areas of the body such as

nerve and pressure points. If struck they cause faintness, weakness, vomiting, paralysis, and could even cause death. These vulnerable areas just described are called "openings." Usually they are the more sensitive areas of nerve pathways and blood supply: for example, the carotid artery supplying blood to the brain via the neck, which is also the area where the vegus nerve passes. Most often areas such as these are the forbidden or restricted points for acupuncture application and some types of massage. The correct posture, by extension and placement of limbs, feet and body angles develops a shell-like envelope around the body making it *"feel as if it has become a ball of steel.*" When this method is correctly employed under attack, the chance of being harmed is greatly reduced since the openings and weaknesses are not exposed. Learn to integrate this method into every move.

"Solid spirit surfing in the sky"

The second part of the concept involves light and dexterous use of the body. Hold the body in such a way that it is agile and yet minimally opened to the previously described vulnerable areas being struck. In archaic martial art terminology it is addressed by the principle *"solid spirit surfing in the sky.*" This is the principle of agility and apparent weightlessness coupled with inner strength. The principle is developed through a "wiry" posture, inner-power training, mental and spiritual preparation, and comes from within. Hands and feet move together in a unified, whiplike manner. To understand the appearance of this type of movement, imagine the motion of a whip. When a whip cracks it strikes and withdraws quickly. The power of the whip does not come from a single link or portion, but from the entire whip. In application, Ba Gua moves like this. The hand, elbow, or other weapon is never used as a separate entity; a strike from the palm is really a strike from the entire body. This is one of most important secrets of the Ba Gua Zhang art. It defines the difference between the common practitioner and the true master.

3. Hollowness versus Solid

Postural habits and strategies that can save your life

In this "hollowness versus solid" principle, ancient wisdom is basic to applied Taoist arts. Mastering this Ba Gua method provides an edge in hand-to-hand or weapon combat. Understand "fullness," understand "hollowness." When something is referred to as "solid" it means that it is full. Applied to the human body, this concept means that the body is full of energy, including *qi*. However in this case it also refers to "fullness" in the sense of a strong attack. When an opponent attacks in a "solid" way, counter with the "secret of emptiness," and

respond to the solid with hollowness; only the inferior man uses force to oppose force.[59] Use of force, even if one is young, strong, and quick is not the best attribute to develop. Understand that one will not always be the youngest, the strongest, and the quickest. Instead, train to understand yin and yang and move to the opponent with the opposite quality. When attacked with solid force, the defender slips aside so that when the opponent strikes, his center will not be where the attacker aimed. Where the attacker aimed he encounters emptiness. Few know how to apply the secret of emptiness.

THE SECRET OF EMPTINESS:

Rhinoceroses, no place to thrust their horns; Tigers, no place to use their claws. Thus the sage allows no place for death to enter. *Tao Te Ching*

In the case of a more advanced fighter who attacks with hollowness, search out his weakness. Observe where he is off balance, full, or empty. Strike his weakness with the deft whiplike technique spoken of earlier.

Regarding the principle of protective hollowness: When in combat remember to keep the abdomen sucked in and coiled back, like a cobra about to strike. When moving in accord with this principle, one will indeed look like a cobra about to strike; the middle body will appear like moving sea waves, fluid and rhythmic. *"Although appearing soft to the uninitiated, the inside of the body will be as solid as steel."*

4. "Cutting the roots" **principle**

Protect yourself by controlling ground

This principle is especially advantageous to the smaller man, as it gives him an advantage against a larger opponent. Ba Gua masters from the earliest times spoke of the concept *"cut your opponents roots and he will topple."* This involves techniques of attacking leg points and an opponent's balance. Leg position and balance are involved with "rooting." Weakening the opponent's root by pressure against where he is holding weight to off-balance or attack the rooted, strong leg in a way that causes pain and it will not be easy for him to attack effectively. This makes him more slow and awkward, greatly reducing his potential mobility and power.

Four "sea" methods

I. "Swallowing the sea"

This involves the strategy of drawing the opponent in, or encouraging the opponent to enter the defender's protected circle, metaphorically having taken *"one*

big gulp of the sea." Control the opponent's positioning as he moves into the area of control by defining the pathway he could take (for example, by displaying an apparently weak guard to one side.) As he comes closer, his position, because of limitations as he commits and attacks, is weaker. As the trap closes, attack where he is weak. This is an ancient military tactic whereby part of an army, usually a central part of the body, after a brief encounter suddenly moves rearward, feigning retreat. The opposing army falls for the feint and, in careless excitement, is led into an immediate rushing forward attack from the side. The attackers find themselves in a classic pincer movement. This first method is an excellent way to draw out and expose your enemy's vulnerabilities.

2. Observing the sea

Observe one's center before initiating an attack. In combat position, center and root by keeping the weight off the heels and by using the middle and balls of the feet to "grab" the ground. Every step should be light, as though the foot were hollow, giving the appearance of floating. At advanced levels, while the foot is light, it is also rooted.[60] This technique requires physical leverage principles to be mastered, wherein movement goes forward yet is at the same time connected with a springlike tension to the weight centered over the back foot.

NOTES ON OBSERVATION

OBSERVE:
- Where the opponent is overly tense
- How to prevent the opponent from countering the attack
- Where the opponent is off-balance
- How he has overfocused his attention

3. Flying over the sea

The image of this lesson is a flock of sparrows, evading and circling potential prey, wheeling back, and counterattacking. The main point of this lesson is that the adept, like the sparrows, circles his opponent and "goes around." Never make straightforward attacks; circling attacks may appear weaker, and in fact tend to cause the loss of some strength and root; however one can address this problem by special movement skills that "replenish strength" (discussed later) and advanced skills that root while moving. Use caution not to be uprooted or risk exposure to attack when circling.

4. Following the sea

Following the sea involves the image of a withdrawing sea where the outward movement of the falling tide exposes the sandy bottom. Following the sea has to do closely with tracking the opponent's retreating movement and searching out his weaknesses, "following" his moves closely to be able to take advantage of inevitable gaps. Follow closely enough and one will *"reach the bottom of the*

sea." Following the sea skill involves the art of observation and timing, observing the opponent's motions, finding weak spots, and striking with "replenished strokes."

Striking with replenished strokes

Striking with replenished strokes means to move in such a way that one strike or positioning "feeds" (or pumps) strength that prepares subsequent movement through physical mechanics: counterforce and presetting the next movement. Learn to bring forth movement and strikes from the body center, the *tan tien.* Every stroke must be moved with gathered strength. This gathered strength brings about a "released and internal power" with the movement. Replenished strokes involve the use of counterforce muscle where one "feeds" or "loads" the next move. When one hand goes out, it is ideally done in such a way that the outward movement stretches and prepares the body for the next movement. When a move is pulled in, the "spring-loaded" counterforce motion attached to the movement pushes out the subsequent "armed" bodily weapon.

Breathing

There are basically two ways to breathe. Commonly, those who are out of tune with nature exert force while breathing with a tensed, unnaturally compressed, "locked" diaphragm during movement. This is called the "valsalva method," common in weight lifting, where tension locks up the body. Although useful if following the design and using it for pushing, this method never releases power and causes tense, locked-up movement due to its denaturing effects and is especially bad for anyone training in the internal arts. Compare this way of breathing with a pro baseball player releasing the pitch. It is the relaxed release of natural breath. When released natural breath is used it will facilitate development of internal power. The valsalva method of locked diaphragm is good for pushing a car or moving a boulder, but makes all martial arts less effective.

The bow and arrow analogy of breathing and released power

Learn to breathe naturally through movement without tension and one will move more efficiently. This is described by the analogy of arrow and bow. Release breath and power in the way the bow launches an arrow. The arrow is shot by the bow, but is not held or pushed. Practice of this will develop the feeling of effortless power. The hand or foot will seem to move on its own.

Stepping

For concealment purposes as well as combat efficiency, move first with false (yin) step, then followed by the real yang step.This is the characteristic stepping of Ba Gua, steppings based on intermixing lightness and strength. The light step can deceive your opponent. The yin and yang of stepping movement are shown in the box at right.

THE YIN AND YANG OF BA GUA STEPPING

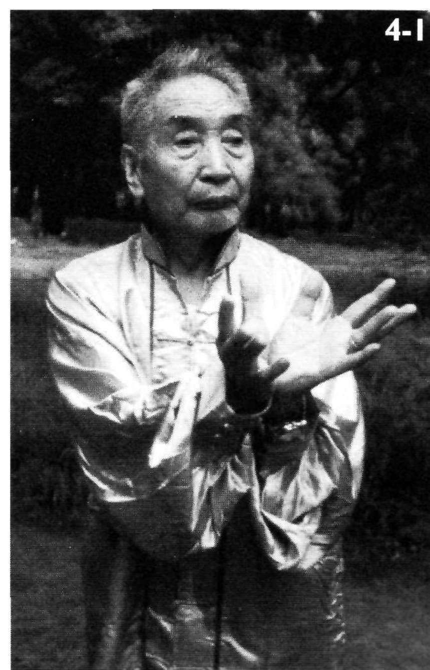
Jin bu	-	yang
Twe bu	-	yin
Forward	-	yang
Back	-	yin
Going out	-	yang
Before movement	-	yin

CHAPTER FOUR

8a *Gua* Qi Gong

Understanding *Qi*

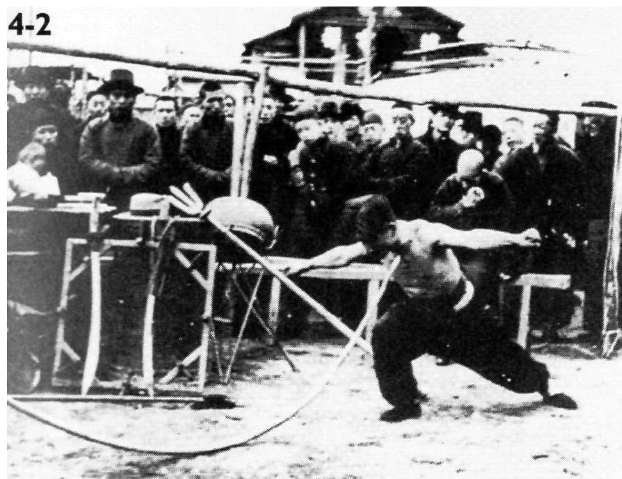
A wounded and dying young martial artist returning from a bloody battle finds his way to his elderly master. The master concentrates his qi *into the student and heals him. The master, having used up the last of his* qi, *having given it all to the student, dies within the hour.*



Master Liu performing a Ba Gua *Qi Cong* exercise.

Fables like this are common in martial arts lore. They illustrate the link between healing *qi* and the martial arts. However, it can be difficult to attain a clear understanding of the terms *qi* and *qi gong* because of their wide variety of uses and contexts. Consider the three photographs shown on the next page of *qigong* masters promoting their skills circa 1900; a man bending a spear pressed against his throat, another having bricks smashed on his chest, and a third man, swallowing a sword. Popular performances of *qi gong* have changed little since that time. Most martial art tournaments today include some demonstration of *qi* powers replete with a variety of "internal-power demonstrations." Audiences thoroughly enjoy shows that include spear-bending, brick and rock breaking, and the like. This is entertainment and, depending on how one defines the subject, not necessarily representative of internal power mastery.

What makes the matter more confusing is that these skills are lumped together with Taoist longevity exercises, traditional medical healing, Buddhist and Taoist meditation, sexual *qi* techniques, and more. A partial list of purported benefits of *qi gong* include longevity benefits, lower blood pressure, cures for cancer, the ability to lighten one's weight so as not to leave a footprint on rice paper, the ability to break bricks and tiles with slight or no physical force, the ability to toss an opponent without physical force, acquiring



Qi gong master demonstrating bending a spear by pressing against it with his throat. 1900 Beijing (Peking).



A *qi gong* master having bricks smashed on his chest as he is suspended between two benches. Beijing 1900.



A *qi gong* master demonstrates swallowing a sword. Beijing 1900.

the "death touch," the ability to be unaffected by extremes of temperature, the ability to project a healing force toward others without physical contact, and protection from the effects of swords or bullets.

Present-day China is witnessing an upsurge of interest in *qi gong.* According to one account reported in the *Los Angeles Times* it is estimated that sixty million people now practice the art form compared to a few hundred thousand a decade ago. In the report, *qi gong* is defined as "a blend of Chinese medicine, Buddhist and Taoist philosophy, magicians' tricks and traditional exercises that is quickly expanding to fill a deep spiritual void in Chinese life."[61] The problem is the same in China as everywhere *qi gong* is demonstrated. How can one make sense of such mixed claims where serious practitioners of traditional medicine use the identical term as the "kung fu" show artists, magicians, and practitioners of yogic meditation? The skills demonstrated by these various professions, although often sharing common themes, are not the same. A brief discussion of the variant models of *qi* and *qi gong* is useful.

Models of *qi* and *qi gong*

It is readily apparent that the difficulty in trying to understand what exactly *qi* is and addressing its potential begins with the monumental problem of separating

myth from fact, of identifying cause and effect, and, as far as reports of miraculous healing are concerned, of accounting for the power of suggestion and belief.[62]

Medical Qi

The concept of *qi* gained some respectability in the West via its cornerstone role in traditional medicine; a discipline that makes the assumption that this type of healing *qi* is science. Presently a voluminous body of scientific studies has been conducted, some of which include animal studies. In this kind of *qi* research there are two main branches; herbology, which regulates the relationship of *qi* to the visceral organs, and acupuncture. Acupuncture medicine is based on manipulation of internal energy circuits (meridians) with insertion of needles. The needles are placed in the gaps (pressure points) along these defined pathways to influence and balance internal *qi*. Where in the West, application of medical *qi* is most common in pain management applications, in the Far East there is much wider use. It is not uncommon to find acupuncture used side-by-side with western medicine in surgery, cancer treatment, physical rehabilitation, and as a therapeutic assist with other serious and chronic disease.

This category of medical *qi* includes acupuncture related health practices that have the goal of inducing change upon acupuncture loci and meridians. These health techniques include therapeutic gymnastics, stretching, breathing, acupressure massage, herbal therapies and other means.

Projecting Qi

Note the problem of defining *qi* if comparing the more "scientific" *qi* to psychic or spiritual *"qi* doctors" who heal their patients without physical contact while "projecting" their *qi* to their patients. The history of this tradition can be traced back to homeless traveling "Taoists" who went from village to village offering mystical cures and begging for alms in order to make a living. Often they would demonstrate "mastery" over their body by sticking needles or rods through their cheeks or forearms. In recent years this type *of fa qi* (projecting *qi)* doctor has begun to gain respectability in China and elsewhere. Presently in China there are many hospitals that include "doctors" of this practice in the treatment of patients. It is noteworthy that the increasing acceptance of this practice has opened doors for charlatans as well. If it is sometimes difficult to say who in China or Taiwan is a legitimate practitioner of this type of practice, the problem looms larger in the West where the typical Westerner has essentially no experience in determining who is and who is not a legitimate "doctor of *qi."*

Sexual *qi gong*

In recent years there has been much interest in the West in Taoist sexual practices. One of the classic texts on the subject, the *Chien Han Shu,* describes the Taoist view on the arts best:

> The arts of the bedchamber constitute the climax of human emotions and touch the very hem of the Tao itself. Therefore the sage-kings regulated man's outer pleasure in order to restrain his inner passions, and set down in writing precepts (for the union of the sexes)___ If such joys are moderate and well-ordered, peace and longevity will follow; but if people are deluded by them and have no care, illnesses will ensure, with serious damage to the nature and span of life.[63]

Since the birth of the "art of the bedchamber" there have been innumerable texts on the subject of the powers and benefits associated with mastery of these Taoist arts. However, the most respected alchemist of all time, Ko Hung (320 B.C.), author of the *Pao Pu Tzu,* didn't think much about sexual *qi* techniques for personal empowerment:

> *Interlocutor:* I have been taught that he who can fully carry out the correct sexual procedures can travel (through the wildernesses safely) alone, and can summon gods and genii [sic]. Further, he can shift disaster from himself and absolve his misdeeds; turn misfortunes into good, rise high in office; double profits if in business. Is this true?
>
> *Ko:* This is all deceptive, exaggerated talk found in the writing of mediums and shamans; it derives from the enlargements and colorings of dilettantes. It utterly belies the facts. Some of it is the work of base liars creating meaningless claims to deceive the masses. Their concealed purpose is to seek service from others; to gather about themselves pupils solely with a view to obtaining advantages for themselves in their own time.[64]

On the other hand, it would be misleading to say that Master Ko didn't place any emphasis on sexual *qi* balance. As previously quoted in Chapter 2, he goes on to say:

> It is of course inadmissible that a man should sit and bring illness and anxieties upon himself by not engaging in sexual intercourse. On the other hand if he indulges his lusts inordinately and indiscriminately, unable to moderate his seminal dispersals, he might as well take an ax to the tree of his life span.[65]

There is not enough room, nor is it the purpose of this text, to examine the ranges of Taoist sexual practices here. However, it is advisable that if one is ever considering the practice of sexual *qi gong,* to remember that a balanced, well-thought-out approach is best. It is worthwhile to regard any special techniques, especially with an unknown teacher, with extreme caution. Don't seek power, and men, avoid extreme measures such as hanging weights from your testicles (a popular and dangerous practice in some martial art circles in Taiwan and now the West). Many types of "power" exercises have very dangerous side effects if practiced wrongly or by a teacher not fully trained in their practice.

Athletic *qi gong*—physical skill

Now consider the world of athletics. Physical skills such as control of muscles shown in the previous photographs from 1900 Beijing represent physical skills and, although bearing the same name, *qi gong,* these skills are not necessarily the same as medical *qi* or psychic/spiritual *qi* just described. Physical powers are trained as any athlete would train and sometimes, as in the cases of many *qi gong* shows, a certain amount of slight of hand is required. Due to its popularity, a special note on the breaking of boards, bricks, and rocks is appropriate. The vast majority of breaking demonstrations require only physical skills and not necessarily any special *qi* skills. Speed, experience, and mechanics account for most of the effect in these demonstrations. However, there are exceptions where something else occurs. Author Bracy describes his own experience:

> Traditionally, internal power manifestation is categorized into three levels, usually translated as overt, covert, and mysterious. In one experience with what I would call mysterious, the phenomena seemed to go beyond normal physical explanations and bio-mechanics.
>
> The event of which I am speaking happened about ten years ago. For years, contrary to traditional prohibitions for internal artists, I practiced board and brick breaking, adding limited amounts of these exercises to the curriculum at my school in southern California. Once, while demonstrating breaking four boards being held a few inches away and chest level, I remember feeling especially internally connected. I broke one set and it felt as if the boards split too easily, as if I was striking butter instead of wood. I also felt or imagined a window open between me and the targeted boards, where I waited for the right moment to place my hands through the window opening and effortlessly break the boards. I felt so confident about the break that I wanted to try it again. Amazed by what I had just experienced, I

instructed my students to again hold four boards in the same manner as before. I knew I could time the movement with the "window" I had felt and lightly, *without* tension, and *without* correct breaking form, be able to flair my fingers through the boards. As in the first case, I performed the second break effortlessly and the four boards seemed to melt at their centers. The experience seemed to be out of the ordinary, one that went beyond the normal laws of physics with the incorrect form of my relaxed and loose fingers. There was no sting or sign of forceful impact on my hands.

I don't practice much breaking anymore, but I have come to value the experience as mystical, one touching something higher and purer and beyond normal boundaries of time and space. The memory of the window, the experience of effortlessness, and the feelings of being in a different dimension, atemporal and aspatial, will stay with me and influence my teaching forever.

Martial *qi gong*

The merging of martial arts with health exercise goes back into some of the earliest written records of martial arts in China. Ta Mo, briefly discussed in Chapter Two, came to China from India in the sixth century, is credited with writing a martial arts and health text and the founding of the Buddhist Shaolin temple. As discussed in Chapter Two and Three, starting during the period of the Boxer Rebellion at the turn of the century, the study of *qi gong* and Taoist alchemy was increasingly linked to martial arts practice. For a common boxer, the main purpose of training was to become impervious to attack and to enhance one's offensive ability. This genre of boxer combined *qi gong* practices with magic amulates, believing that these additions would help protect him. The boxer period hailed a grassroots movement to throw out the foreigners and it was during the same period select intellectuals became involved with martial art study. For many of these intellectuals their interest was deeper than that of the common boxer. To perfect their arts, they included spiritual and health interests. Taoist yoga and Taoist alchemy were the roots of this knowledge. This discipline of



Dave Phelps practicing Ba Gua at the ruins of the Great Wall.

postures, movements, and special exercises (such as minute stretching of the spine and visceral organ inner massage) concerned itself with developing and moving internal energy and with the transformation of the body.

Breath-control techniques were also important to Taoist yogic alchemy, which predate the terms *qi gong* and kung fu. These have always been associated with the development of special powers. Arthur Waley described this phenomenon of the Taoists and the powers attributed to the skill known as "womb breathing" as the essence of breath control.

> He who has mastered it can cure every disease, expose himself with immunity to epidemics, charm snakes and tigers, stop wounds from bleeding, stay under the water or walk on it, stop hunger or thirst, and increase his own life span to become a *chen ren* or Purified One.[66]

Ba Gua is a Taoist yogic and martial art involving the use of Taoist transformational exercises and special breathing. Originating from mountain-dwellers seeking health and immortality, today Ba Gua is primarily an art of health. Ba Gua *qi gong,* the name for Ba Gua exercises that promote health and longevity exercises, is the main concern of this chapter.

Five Methods, Eight Gates

Ba Gua Zhang has its own types of *qi gong* practice for health and martial purposes. This type of *qi gong,* among the last of the pure Taoist *qi gong* still practiced, uses Ba Gua circle-walking methods to facilitate this life-enhancing martial and energy training. In this chapter, details of a specific Ba Gua *qi gong* exercise that was handed down from Master Liu Bin to author Liu Xing-Han is presented. It is called the Five Methods, Eight Gates.

WHY IS "WALKING THE CIRCLE" SO IMPORTANT IN BA GUA ZHANG PRACTICE?

Ba Gua was designed as a close-quarter combat art. The circle study methodology requires the student to master subtle curvature change while in motion. After much practice along exacting sets of circles, the student integrates curves and angles into the depth of his being, essential for close-quarter turning and combat knowledge. Repetitive practice of detail is essential in many art forms. It is seen as the practicing of scales by the musician in training, and the poses in classical ballet. In the U.S. Marine corps, rifle marksmanship is trained in a similar manner. Long before ever touching a bullet, Marine recruits practice for hours on end aiming and pulling the trigger at symbols appearing as miniature targets. In U.S. Marine Corps marksmanship training this practice is called "snapping in," a **process** where old habits are replaced by imprinting of new muscular memories. The practice of "walking the circle" is the Ba Gua version of "snapping in."

Essentials of Ba Gua

1. Relax tension, but do not become limp.
2. Round the back (do not hunch).
3. Sink the *qi* to the *tan tien.*
4. Slightly concave the chest.
5. Calm and prepare the mind.
6. Don't use excessive strength.
7. Breathe from the lower belly.

Ba Gua primer: walking the circle

"Walking the circle" is the most fundamental exercise in Ba Gua Zhang. It is the foundation upon which all development in the art is based; as such, it is vital that the Ba Gua practitioner fully understand circle-walking.

Begin by defining the circle. It is traditional to draw (or imagine) a circle eight feet in diameter.[68] It is also common for Ba Gua circles to have a central reference point, on which the practitioner orients his movement; trees are often used.

When walking in a clockwise direction, place the right foot forward; when walking counterclockwise, the left foot leads. The lead foot is on the inner edge of the circle's boundary, and the rear foot is on the outer edge. Note that the feet do not walk *on* the line of the circle, but along the edge.

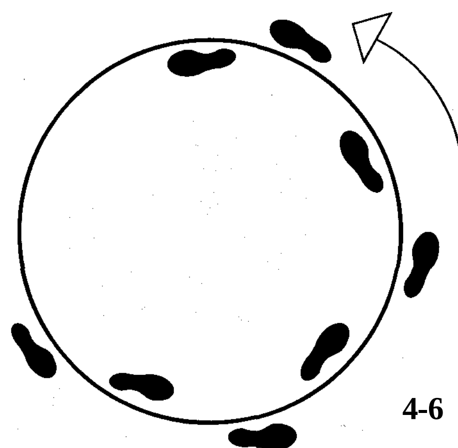
Now drop the weight, so that the lower body fully supports the upper. Bend at the knees until you are sitting well back on the thighs. Hold the weight in the rear leg, so that the lead foot is "empty"—that is, you may lift it from the ground without upsetting your balance. Push into the ground with the rear foot, simultaneously stretching the top of the head upward, as if it is being drawn up by a string. *Do not* rest the weight by holding it in the hips. Use the body's upward stretch to continuously work the leg muscles.

Turn the upper torso to face the circle's center. Stretch the inner arm toward the center, palm forward, fingers pulled back and vertical, rounding the palm. Stretch the outer arm across the body, towards the center, as if guarding the ribs; "point" at the inner arm's elbow with the index finger. Simultaneously, strive to eliminate sharp angles from the upper body, and from the body in general: concave the chest, and curve the arms as they stretch toward the circle's center.

ADVICE FROM ROBERT SMITH'S *PA KUA*

For your body to accept the gift of this art it must not only be disciplined but also must literally be remade. By endeavoring to subtract the antagonism, spasms, and clumsy habits accumulated since birth, we are able to achieve a "prebirth" (that is, a natural) body. This is a body capable of being molded correctly. It involves, initially, relaxation and softness from which later springs true hardness. Do the exercises slowly so as to enhance feeling. Think and feel mightily as you do the movement. Pause at the end of the movement—inaction often aids relaxation. The more you relax in the first phase, the more strength you will have in the second.[67]

Step forward with the lead foot to begin walking the circle, and use the forward leg to "pull" the hips forward, without "swinging" the weight through. The feet move along the circle as if on two separate tracks, one just inside the circle, the other just outside:


4-6

As you walk, keep the knees close so that they brush together while stepping with each movement. Transfer weight to the lead foot only when ready to use it to pull the rear leg forward. Finally, you must constantly reorient the upper body to the circle's center, changing the angles of the curved, stretched arms and palms continuously stretching outward.

The following material is presented in four levels. The easiest way to learn is to master each level in sequence. For simplicity in learning, the first level is only walked counterclockwise. At level two, more complex transitional internal energy training moves are added, at level three, advanced energetic manipulation is emphasized and, at level four (not shown except for the opening posture) the student performs the series in the opposite direction.

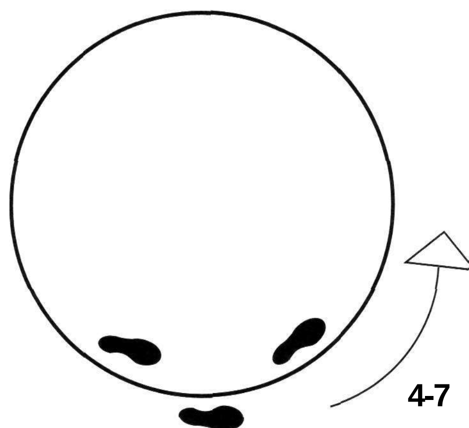




First Gua: *"Qi* still and step on the earth"

Charging the tan *tien qi*

Starting with the right foot forward, walk counterclockwise around the circle. Face the center of the Ba Gua circle. Turn right and begin walking in a counterclockwise direction, keeping the body weight low into the legs and the back rounded and relaxed. The simultaneous spreading of the fingers emphasizes, via posture and mind direction, concentrating *qi* into the lower *tan tien.* There should be a slight curving of the elbows, the shoulders should be stretched yet relaxed, and the chest should have a slight rounding. The positioning of the feet and curving (rounding) the body conform to the Ba Gua circle. The mind is calmed. The eyes are focused ahead and the head is level.



Yogic

Begin the exercise by concentrating the *qi* at the *tan tien* energetic center. A traditional depiction of the *tan tien* is shown in diagram 4-10. Then *qi* moves into the extended and outward stretched palms.

This movement trains internal power to be condensed while *qi* and blood flood the hands.

With practice, the student will feel heat and tingling in the fingers and palm. When this happens, the power is strongly concentrated and starting to be developed.

NOTE **ON** THE **TAN TIEN**

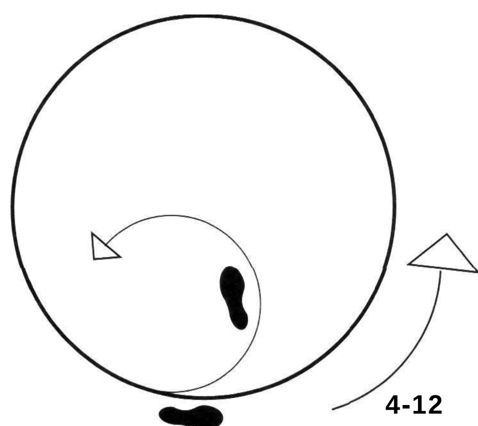
The Tan Tien (field of Tan) is the traditional center of qi storage and manufacture. Located traditionally between the navel and the pubic bone, it is the natural balance center of the body. It takes its name metaphorically from the outer alchemist tradition which used various vessels to change and refine lead, mercury and other substances to create the "Tan," the drug of immortality."

Therapeutic

This exercise, because of its stretching value, maintains looseness and overall health of the mid- to upper back, and is traditionally recommended for those suffering from back pain.

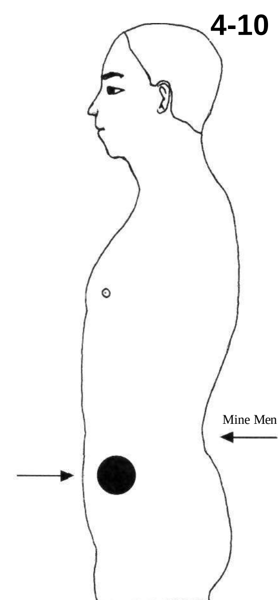
Other therapeutic aspects:

1. Increases local blood and nerve supply.
2. Increases and maintains flexibility of tendons in the metacarpal and carpal tunnel regions of the hand and wrist.
3. Shoulder joint flexibility.





Perform at least one circumnavigation of the Ba Gua circle.



Traditional view of Tan Tien locus.

The walking method

Walk with the left foot first, followed by right foot in a continuous counter-clockwise stepping manner. Turn in a small counterclockwise circle (two-foot diameter) before ending in this position. Photo 4-11 shows the terminal position of the small (two-foot) circle. The hands extend and spread outward, but the arms, seeming as though they are resisting this movement, are held close to the body. This creates counter-opposed muscular action to "open the joints."

Second Gua: "Extend energy through middle basin"

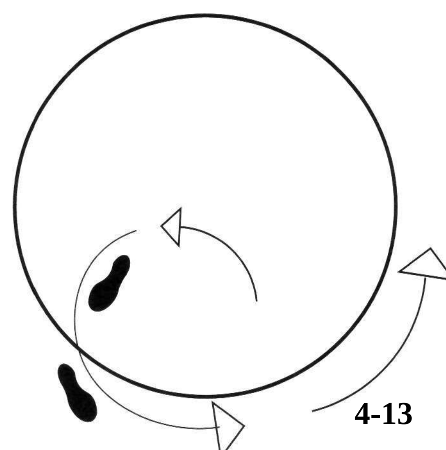
Continue walking the circle. Extend power outward at middle basin (middle of the body). The arms are held in a stretched out position away from the body center.



Middle palm up position

Yogic

Concentrating and then extending power outward represents a model derived from nature where a young sapling extends its leaves and reaches out to the sky to collect the radiant powers of the sun.



Proper and "internally connected" twisting of the hands and fingers as shown in photos stimulates the energy of the kidneys, the root energy for internal power training. This practice is very useful for developing "kidney *yin* and *yang* energy." The pressure created by twisting the arm and wrist with the torso in correct position opens the urinary bladder meridian in the back and the kidney meridian on the front of the body (the urinary bladder meridian couples with the kidney meridian). While performing these exercises, stretch and activate the adductor muscles (on the inside of the legs). The ascending *yin* meridians of the leg pass through the medial (inside aspects) of the legs. Correctly performed, the effect of this exercise can be equivalent to an acupuncture treatment to reinforce and nurture the kidneys and kidney energy. Another advantage is that through the stretching and pulling by the adductor tendons onto the pelvic region, hip flexibility is maintained or improved. This is a good treatment for certain types of lower back pain.

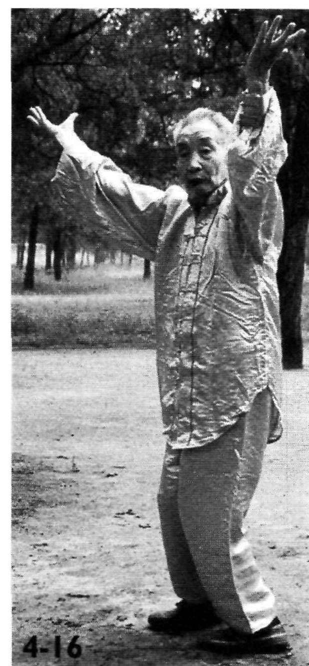
BASIN QI GONG TRAINING

Traditionally there are three basins in the internal martial arts, those being the lower, middle and upper.

Therapeutic

The hands and fingers are extended so that the power that began in movement one continues to be "held" and directed to the extremities. It aids in elbow and wrist flexibility. An additional benefit is that this exercise develops a traction effect to pull and loosen trapezius muscles of the upper back and shoulder.

Third Gua: "Young man shoulders the mountain"

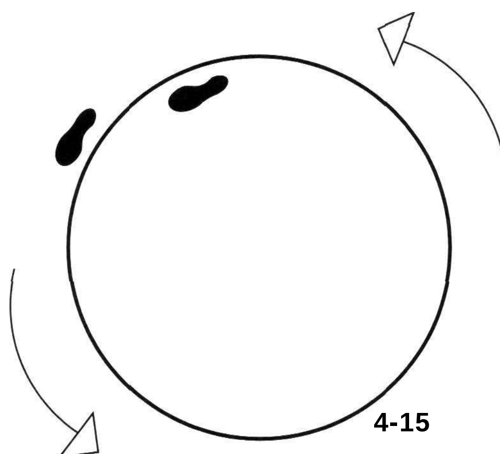


Continue walking. Practice this Gua by lifting the hands while keeping the fingers spread and the palms up. It should be done without tensing the shoulders. As the Ba Gua practitioner continues walking the circle counterclockwise, the elbows, leading the arms, stretch forward and toward center while there is a counterforce stretching of the back.

It is very important that over-stretching or "hunching" of the back does not occur.

Yogic

Correct counterforce stretching creates the classical slight concaving of the chest, and advanced leverage potential essential for internal martial arts mastery. The photo shows a completion of the initial charging of the *tan tien qi* and its extension into the extremities.



Therapeutic

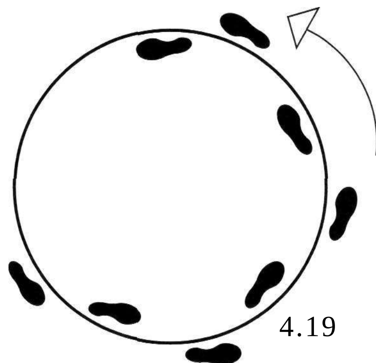
This exercise relieves upper torso tension, congestion, and constriction, and frees the *qi* to promote healthy upper respiratory action. Additionally, this posture has a therapeutic effect upon the elbows and wrists since it encourages full-range stretching of the ligaments and muscles around the joint. Lack of full-range motion is a precursor to joint deterioration.


4-17

Fourth Gua: "Embrace moon"

Turning the joints outward

Walk with the right foot forward, palms toward sky. These photos show the beginning steps of this walking Ba Gua *qi gong* exercise. As shown, the practitioner "walks the circle" for at least half the circle's circumference. When practicing this part of the exercise, the shoulder, elbows, and wrist joints turn in a coordinated, sinuous outward way, "opening the joints."


4.19

While practicing the movement, keep the mind calm and centered. Breathe deeply and slowly, directing the *qi* to the lower *jiao* (lower belly) and legs.


4-18

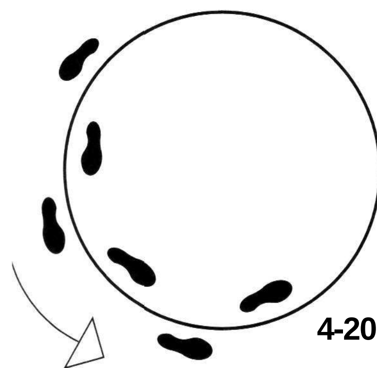
Yogic

It is important to make an association between hand position and sensation of the movement of internal energy in the body. This exercise develops the ability to concentrate and move the power from the upper to the lower portions of the body as necessary. It is a direct transmission of archaic Taoist yoga into martial arts.

Therapeutic

"Opening the joints" applies to the stretching of the ligament and tendons while maintaining connection with the body center *(tan tien)* while at the same time releasing excessive, habitual tension of the neck and shoulder complex. To perform this posture correctly *relax* the trapezius muscles in the shoulders as the arms stretch outward. Note diat the arms stretch upward and that the elbows are slightly bent while stretched. This posture encourages the flushing of the lymphatic system.


4-21

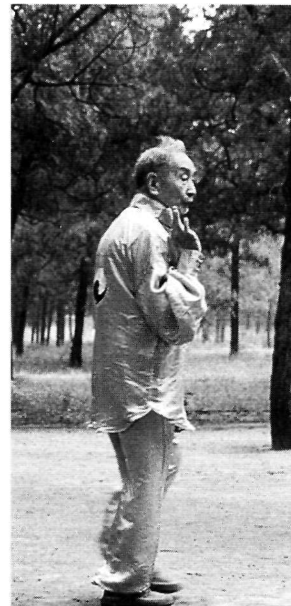

4-20

Yogic

After the *qi* is "charged" (blood and nerve activity increase in the palms and forearms), one must be careful to maintain the sensation and awareness of the charged energy throughout the entire body. This, in turn, concentrates the energy through the individual's extended palms and fingers.

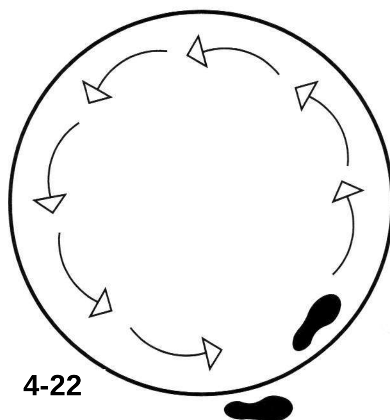
Fifth Gua: "Bear lifts roof"

After making at least one circumnavigation of the circle, begin this part with a tight turn stepping pattern. The hands come close to the shoulders while the chest is stretched.



Yogic

While opening the back, this posture concentrates the power tight to the chest. Ideally, heat or pressure sensations are felt in the center of the palms.



AWARENESS, BIOFEEDBACK AND INTERNAL ENERGY:

Maintaining awareness of the "charged energy" becomes a type of biofeedback signal which increases the depth and effectiveness of *qi gong* practice as well as *qi* training in the internal martial arts. To develop *qi* biofeedback ability, learn to notice and control through posture and mental focus a sensation of warmth or tingling in the hands and later other areas of the body. This skill usually occurs after the student has had a certain amount of regular practice, but in some cases it is noticed right away. There has been from ancient times the understanding of the relationship between *qi* and blood. Thus, sensations related to *qi* flow are those that relate to blood flow. The sensation of heat or tingling in the hands is a result of increased nerve activity and blood supply which can be noticed and used for the biofeedback signal. When this signal is present, qi along with the blood flow sensations has increased. Once the student has attained the sensation, training becomes increasingly easier with increased awareness and control of the biofeedback signal.

Sixth Gua: "Lion holds ball"

Continue walking the circle. This posture can be held in multiple circumnavigation of the Ba Gua circle.

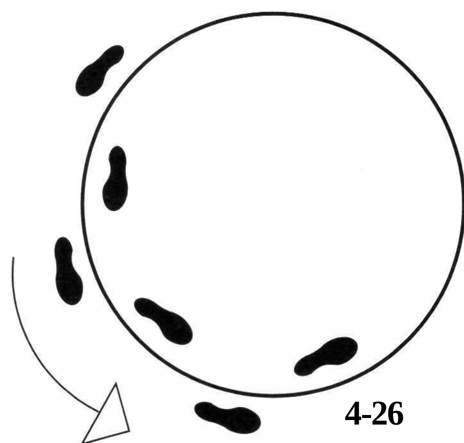

4-24


4-25

Yogic

"Holding the ball of *qi"* is a common move in the internal arts. When performed static it is called "embrace post posture." Here it is performed while walking in a Ba Gua circle. The effects of this posture are very deep and may not be appreciated in the early stages of practice. Its value lies in the sensation of building and maintaining the concentration of internal energy through the multicurved posture that develops control of internal power.

Move the power and the *qi* from the upper to the middle warmer* while walking the Circle (lower hands, palms down, as you continue to walk the circle). Energy awareness represents the point where traditional Chinese medicine (acupuncture, herbology) meets Taoist yoga and the internal martial arts. According to traditional medicine, it is essential that the energy of the three warmers *(sanjiao)* be balanced. Out of balance "warmer" activity is viewed as the root of many diseases.


4-26

This is a classic Ba Gua moving *qi* posture where, with practice, experienced practitioners will feel an electromagnetic-like sensation occurring in a shape that feels like a ball of energy. Once acquired, maintain this sensation to control *qi* while you walk in a counterclockwise manner.

Therapeutic

This exercise alleviates chronic shoulder, neck, and back tension; the resulting deterioration of the shoulder tendons and reduces tension patterns in the neck.

*In traditional medicine and Taoist yogic practice the three warmers regulate the heat in the upper, middle, and lower torso.

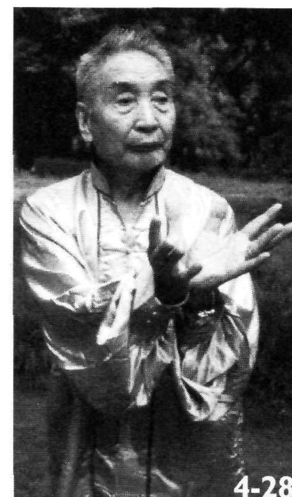
Seventh Gua: "Lotus palm"

The lotus palm is one of the trademark positions of authentic Ba Gua. Often the significance of the movement is not fully appreciated. Via practice of this posture, each finger becomes a flexible and potent weapon while simultaneously being trained as a healing instrument.

As the circle is walked (shown here in a clockwise manner) each finger is stretched and reaches out forming a whole in the same way that petals of a flower form a "whole." The eyes are concentrated as if aiming the energy from the fingers.



4-27



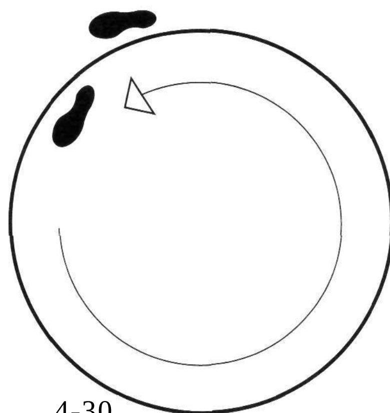
4-28

Yogic

With this practice an association will be formed between the intent to direct energy and the extension of that *energy* through the palms and fingers. Note that the elbows are held close together.

Therapeutic

This exercise focuses *qi* into the hand and is good for all types of hand and finger rehabilitation. If a student practices this method correctly, drawing and extending power from the forearm, this will be a great aid in reducing or eliminating carpal tunnel syndrome and nonsystemic arthritis.



4-30

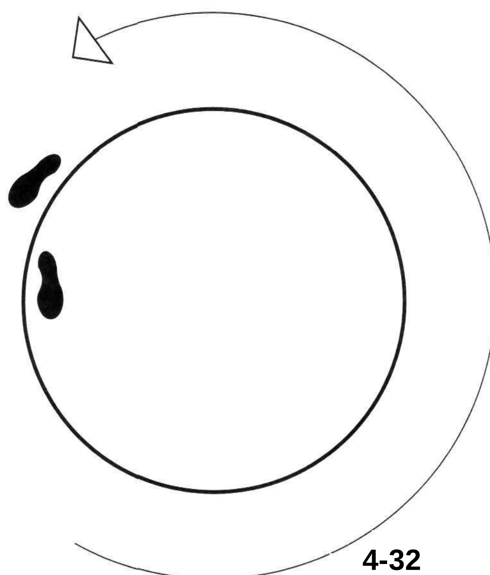


4-29

Eighth Gua: "Acquire the heart palm"


4-31

The outside palm (in this direction the right) is held out and slightly to the outside above the brow. The inside palm is held straight up and down in "disciple prays to Buddha" posture.


4-32

Yogic:

This is a kidney *qi gong* exercise for releasing heart tension and balancing energetic flow. Kidneys are the storage basin of *qi* and have a long association with health exercise. The goal in this exercise is to create an electrical-like sensation that is associated with warmth in the finger tips and the kidney organ area itself.

Level two: leading the receptive energy to heal the body

After students have mastered the fundamental movements of the form, these "receptive energy" exercises are a valuable addition to the Ba Gua *qi gong* exercises. They are the yin movements that draw *qi* into the visceral organs. They may be added in between the sets of exercises *(guas)* in Level One.





Movement I

Elbows and forearms twist inward. Transition to receiving the energy in the upper torso.

Movement 2

Wrists touch and fingers are placed lightly on the chest.

Therapeutic

These positions depict a turn from outward extension and development to an inward focus of power. When the energy is moved into the heart region, the hands and posture become relaxed. Never use tension with any exercise that directly applies to the heart. In traditional Chinese medicine, the heart is considered the Emperor organ and is rarely directly treated. The ideal way to perform this exercise is with the feeling that the back and chest cavity is stretching and relaxing tension around the heart. To do otherwise creates pressure in the upper chest cavity, which does not allow ideal expansion or contraction of the cardiac muscle.

Level three: advanced manipulation of qi: "Bring qi through the wrists"


4-35

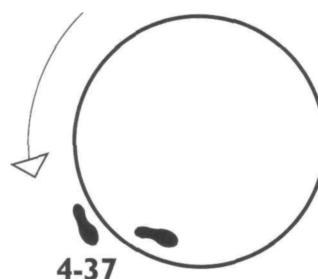

4-36

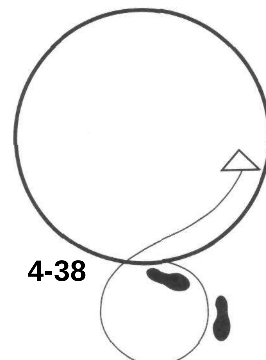
Another variation of sensing and directing qi. The wrists turn and press against each other. These exercises can be used as a separate transition or in conjunction with movements from Level Two.

Maintain continuous pressure and electric-like sensations in the wrists throughout the movements.

Yogic

When *qi* can be felt evenly on all sides of the wrists while they are turned, the *qi* through the body will be balanced.

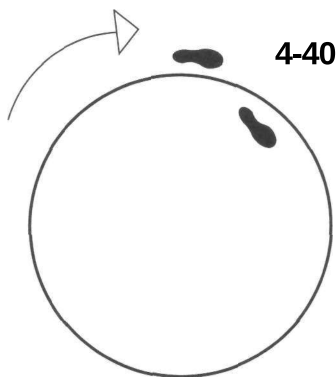

4-37


4-38

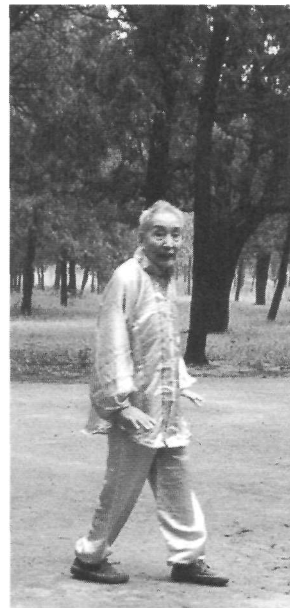
Footwork: A small sub-circle which become a tight turn external to the main circle accompanies this exercise.

Level four: the opposite side

After the first three *guas* are clearly understood in one direction, the *guas* can be practiced on the opposite side. When practicing this way, each *gua* should be followed by its opposite. Photo 4—39 shows the opening move of the series from the other direction.



4-40



4-39

Walking the opposite direction. (Photo shows opening posture.)

8a Gua Two-Man Application Drills

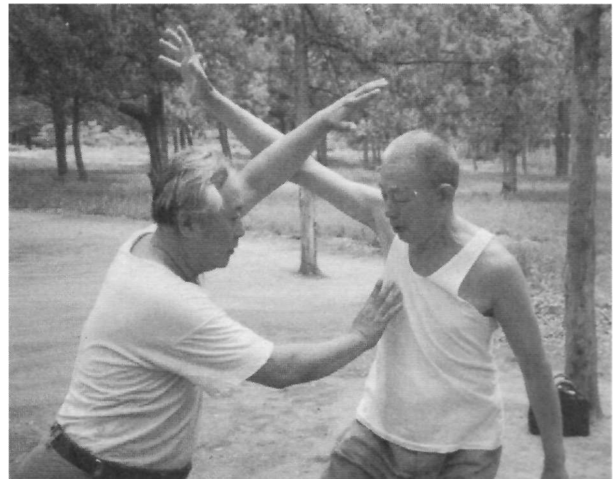
There are many texts that illustrate the various Ba Gua solo forms, but few that address the art's dual-person systems. The focus of the present chapter is the rarer training method: that of two-man training routines. The two-man methods, called *tiao da* (neutralizing a strike) and *dzwo ma* (walking a horse) are special methods to teach sensitivity, subtleness, and opponent control.

走馬
dzwo ma

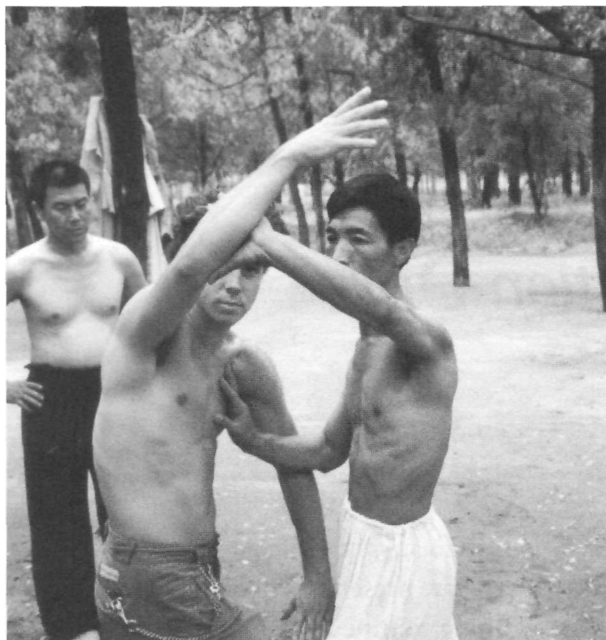
楊永利
Yang Yong-Li

陳國華
Cheng Guo-Hna

The ultimate Ba gua, like any internal martial art, involves employing *subtle* pressures and leverages to subdue an opponent. It is far easier to use obvious or brute force to beat an opponent, but it is difficult to subdue him with subtlety. What is meant by subtlety? It is the art of using the slightest touch, redirecting and turning it back against the opponent who originated the force. Sometimes neutralizing, sometimes leading aside, it involves matching the fine variations of pressures of the opponent with near imperceptible neutralization and redirection. However, subtlety can be mastered by only the most dedicated and persistent students of the art. It involves refined skills of becoming sensitive, staying calm under pressure, and directing the situation by the power of one's will. Thus, the highest level requires study of the mind and the nervous system. It involves thorough knowledge of subtle commands sent through the medium of the nervous system and musculature, an awareness greatly increased compared to the average person. This is the superior man's way to know and ultimately defeat an opponent.



Shown here are two senior Ba Gua uncles Yang Yong-Li and Cheng Guo-Hua practicing Ba Gua two-man drills at Temple of Heaven Park, Beijing.



American Ba Gua enthusiast Chris Gulbrandson studies two-person drills and applications with Ba Gua cousins in Beijing, 1994.

In the exercises that follow, Ba Gua dual-person training matter are illustrated. This body of knowledge incorporates a method that will seem immediately familiar to students of *t'ai chi ch'uan.* The material incorporates Ba Gua concepts, notably the use of sensitivity training to manipulate the opponent with subtle pressure. In mastering this material, one learns to feel the opponent's weight and intent; they are the keys to instantly knowing what the opponent is about to do next, even before a movement is initiated. As in ***t'ai** chi ch'uan,* the goal is to employ this knowledge against the attacker. Also as in ***t'ai** chi ch'uan,* overt and crude force is thought to be of lesser value in the pursuit of ultimate principles and is discouraged.

In this chapter three different drills will be shown. Drill 1 is practiced from a relatively static position; much of the exercise is demonstrated with two opponents facing off in a narrow stance. The main point of this exercise is to develop sensitivity and control using the back of the hands and forearms while retaining balance and control

SOME NOTES ON PARTNER TRAINING

The right training partner makes a world of difference. Ideally you want to train with a partner that gives you the appropriate resistance and challenge for your level, or a senior advanced enough to know your level and work from the right mindset without the interference of ego.

Overcompetitiveness, especially in the early years of training, is a negative since it will limit the student's development. When the student is overly concerned about winning, the goal becomes beating the other person rather than improving. Say for example that during simulated combat practice a student comes at me with a strong attack that takes me to the floor. I am strong and experienced and can probably beat most attacks by less-experienced students without too much trouble. However, I have found that if I allow myself to get into a precarious situation and become severely disadvantaged (which enables the junior to successfully work his best technique) it challenges me far greater. Though I may have to give up more often, I learn a great deal more. I believe that this approach to combat art is superior to a "domination model" (the toughest guy walks out alive) approach. Not only does a cooperative approach benefit the junior student but the senior is able to look at his mind and emotion in the midst of the mock combat. I learn more by not using what would have been an easy way out. Being in the right state of mind while being pinned and choked on the ground (especially by a nonenemy) is a great learning environment.

In training, learn to watch your mind and emotions as well as physical skill. Thus, partner routines that can be repeated back and forth endlessly (such as those in this chapter) foster development of a mental laboratory to not think about the material so much, and instead concentrate on his or her inner universe.

from a narrow base. Drill 2 uses movements that expand the chest and arms, which develop intercostal total body power while extending power and maintaining a high degree of leg maneuverability and control while turning. Drill 3 teaches the student to turn with the force of attack while maintaining close control with one's back and shoulders.

Two-Man Drill Number I

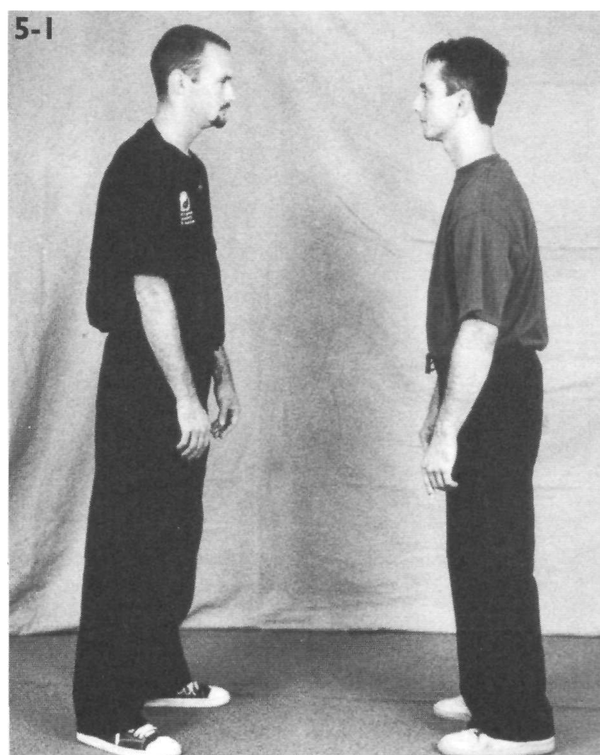
"Attacking" partner (right) initiates a right-hand attack toward defender's (left) head with a sweeping and outward arm motion. Defender deflects with an outward *tiao* deflective movement.

LESSON

Hand-to-hand simultaneous attack/defense. *Tiao* (a deflective blocking move) is shown in the photo. This exercise develops skills of sensing and neutralizing an attack. Note that the entire arm is used in a glancing manner, going forward, not like a karate block going outward. This is an example of applying subtle principles.

LESSON

Lower level panic, and use excess strength and muscle is replaced by higher level skills of anticipation, mental control (calmness), and correct application of calculated technique when under attack.

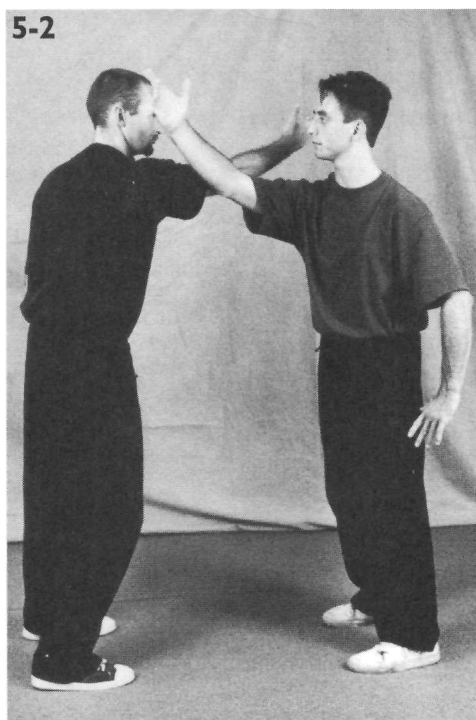


Defender Attacker

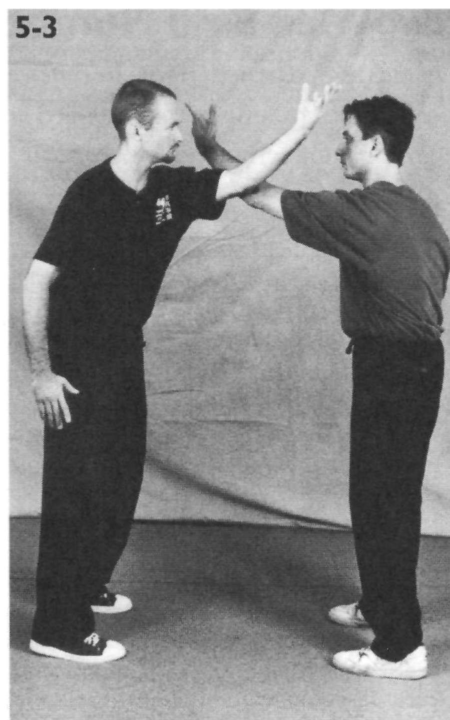
Start from a neutral position. Defender (at left) prepares to defend against attacker (at right).

LESSON

Defend by gliding the attack on an slightly outward deflective angle, and use care not to meet force with direct force, typical of a karate style outward block.



Transitional movement. Note: Movements are fluid and continuous.



Now, the original attacker becomes the defender. The drill involves the original attacker performing the deflective defense that was used in photo 5-2, but from the other side.

LESSON

Guide technique. Note that each attack is guided past the defender's center. The fingers are stretched. This develops connected power through the entire body instead of power that is isolated and brought from the shoulders.



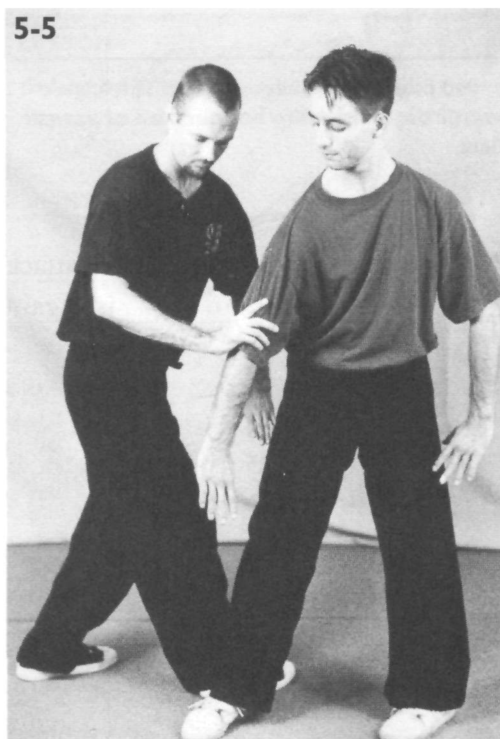
Another attack. The original attack shown in photo 5-2 is again repeated. The right's attack is neutralized as in the previous side. Note that the yin or passive hand in both attackers is readied for the next attack/defense exchange.

LESSON

Two-man attack and defense to decrease reaction time and develop automatic responses.



5-5A



After the third series of attacks (photos 5-2, 5-4, and 5-5) the initial attacker (shown at left in photo) attempts to pull the defender (right) off balance and steps in. The defender steps in with his right foot so as not to lose balance.

GRAB POSITION: control at elbow. The photos show the posture for close control of elbow.

The defender is not disturbed by the attacker's sudden pull on his arm, but uses the new force in his own favor and moves with it. The defender (in photo 5-6, shown in the lower aspect of the photo) will first sense, then deflect and control the opponent with "his back."

走馬
dzwo ma

Dzwo ma (walking the horse), also known as "rolling back," trains the student to sense opponent's weight, center, position, and intent. The back becomes a "sensor."[69] The sensor concept has been described earlier in Chapter Three. In advanced Ba Gua the entire body including the back and shoulder become a viable part of the Ba Gua arsenal.

LESSON FOR THE ATTACKER

Close-range grab and control of the opponent's elbow joint in the midst of combat.

LESSON FORTHE DEFENDER

Maintain balance and "centeredness" even with a surprise pull from the opponent.

LESSON

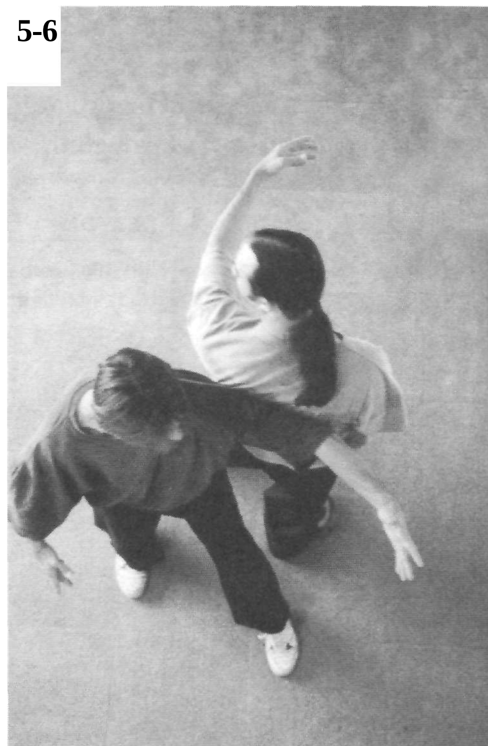
Calm response to a grab.

LESSON

Responding to a forceful pull by turning it into a counterattack.

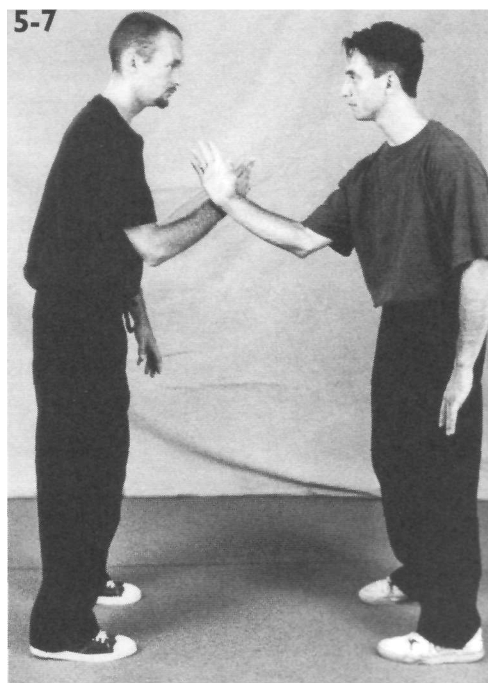
LESSON

"Using your back" *(dzwo ma)* to pressure, control, and off balance the opponent.



(A different "attacker" model was used for this photo.)

The partners, turning back around, have reversed position. Photo 5-7 shows a reversal of position from the initial attack shown in photo 5-3. Here both partners turn around after completing the "rolling the back" exercise. They have maintained contact through the entire movement and end up in this position again facing each other. With the reversal of positions the previous defender is now the attacker.He initiates a right-hand attack to the opponent's center, which the new defender (left) immediately deflects.



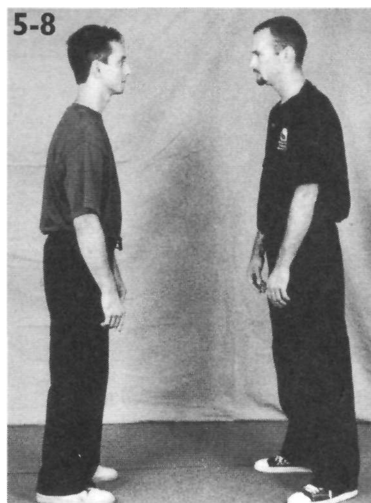
This drill may be repeated continuously with defender and attacker from first drill assuming opposite roles.

Two-Man Drill Number 2

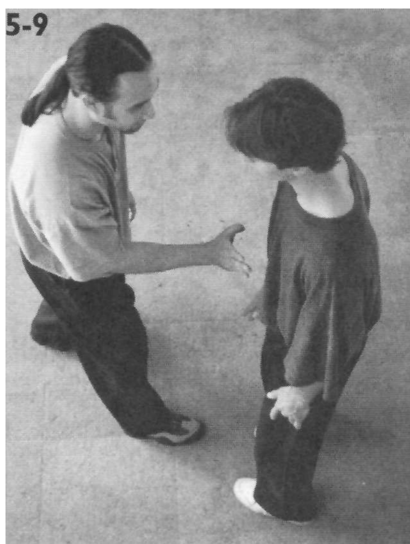
This drill teaches the practitioner to turn and extend and thus "open the power" through the entire body to respond and counter an attack.

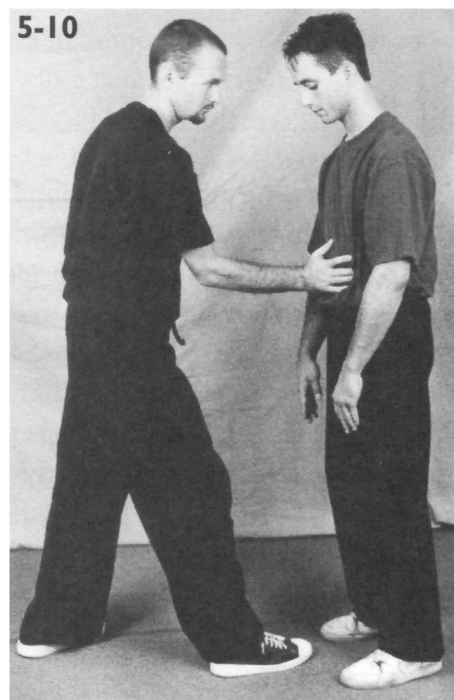
LESSON

Learning to deflect a forceful attack outward while stepping and connecting the entire body's unified strength.



Opponents face off.





Overhead and side view of attack.

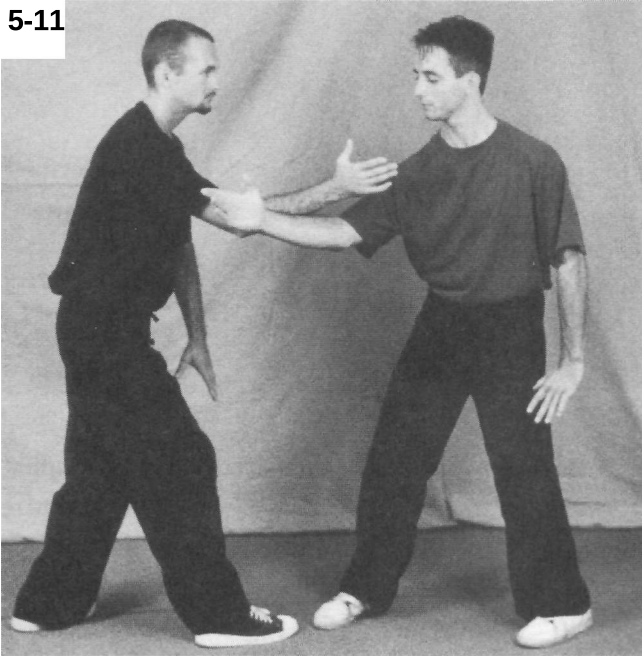
These photos show an attacker stepping in with a right-handed attack toward defender's mid-torso at right.

The defender steps to the rear and places his right hand underneath attacker's right hand and prepares to move it outside to his right and away from the center to neutralize the attack.

Defender (right in lower-left photo) deflects (not blocks) the attacker's arm to the outside as he steps back.

LESSON

Protect your center by using subtle inward and outward angles, do not push or block an opposing force.

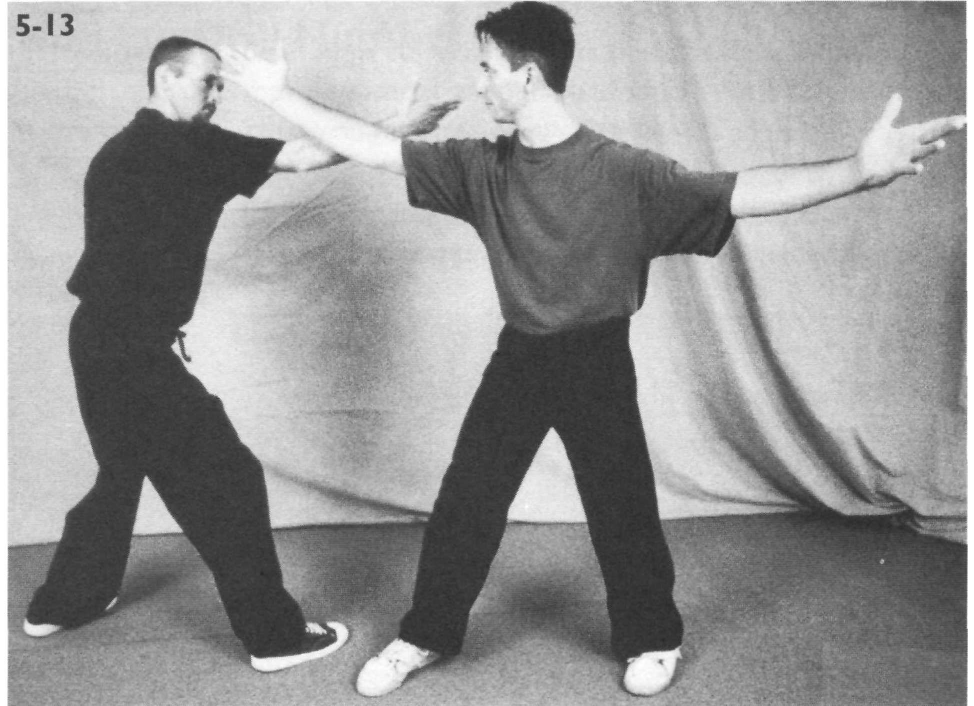




As the attacker (left) steps forward, the defender (right) steps back.

LESSON

The entire body's connected force is trained in the form of counterforce. Counterforce is the balancing of force throughout the entire body, as opposed to unbalanced and overuse of shoulders or hips. *Note:* Rear hand stretches to rear to open rib cage, using entire body's force.



The completion of the movement is shown here. The outstretched arms emphasize and train the full strength of the ribcage.[70] This practice will open the entire body's unified power. Exaggerated movements of the arm stretching is a training device; this type of wide arm swing would not be used in combat. After the muscles and counterforce through the body are trained, the movement becomes condensed, even invisible to all but the most advanced internal martial artist. The Chinese expression for this method of practice is "study large, use small."

LESSON

Train the entire body's strength as you train to react to attack and counterattack.

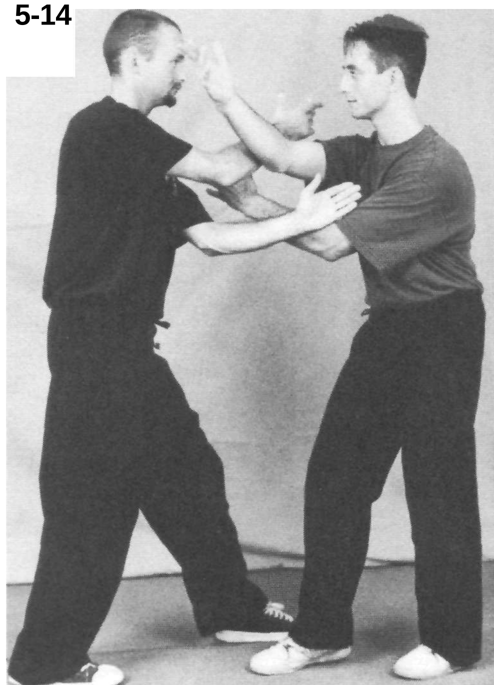
LESSON

Opening the entire body's power by expanding the rib cage.

Transitional movement—the attack continues: The partner at left again attacks, this time with an advancing left hand and foot. The defender (right) meets the attacker's left-hand attack and prepares to step backward with his right foot.

LESSON

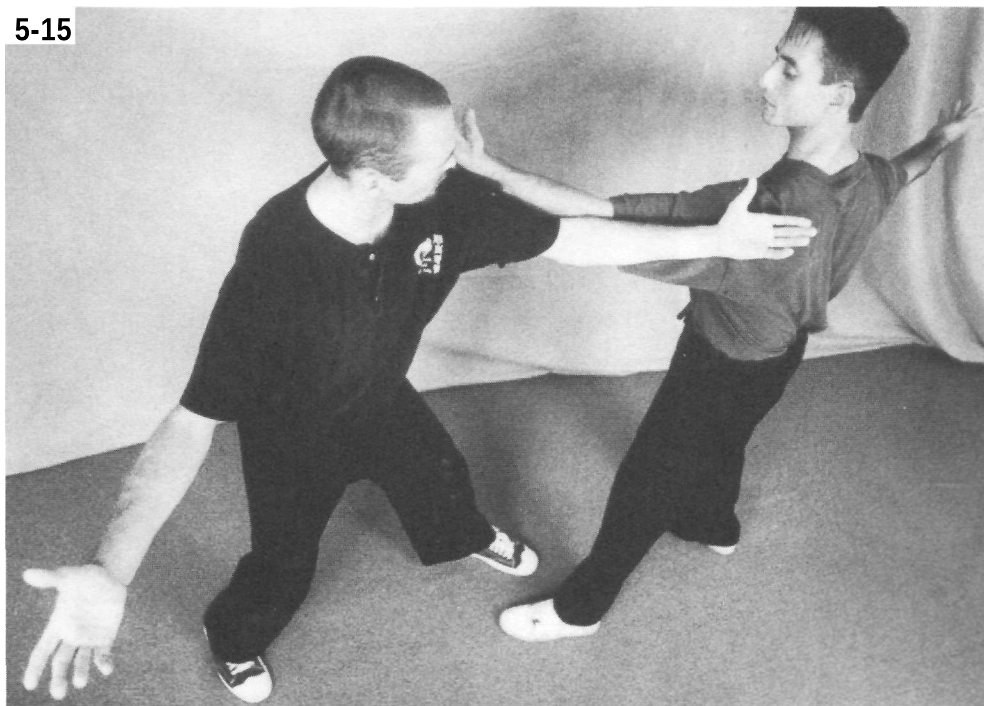
Reaction training to continue defense.



5-14

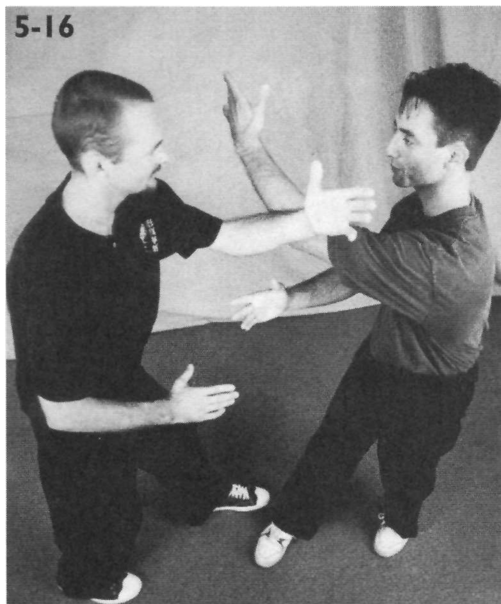
The defender has started to move to the rear with the new defense. The left foot has advanced.

Repeated movement, identical to that shown in photo 5-13, but with the opposite body orientation and arm position. The defender has already stepped to the rear.



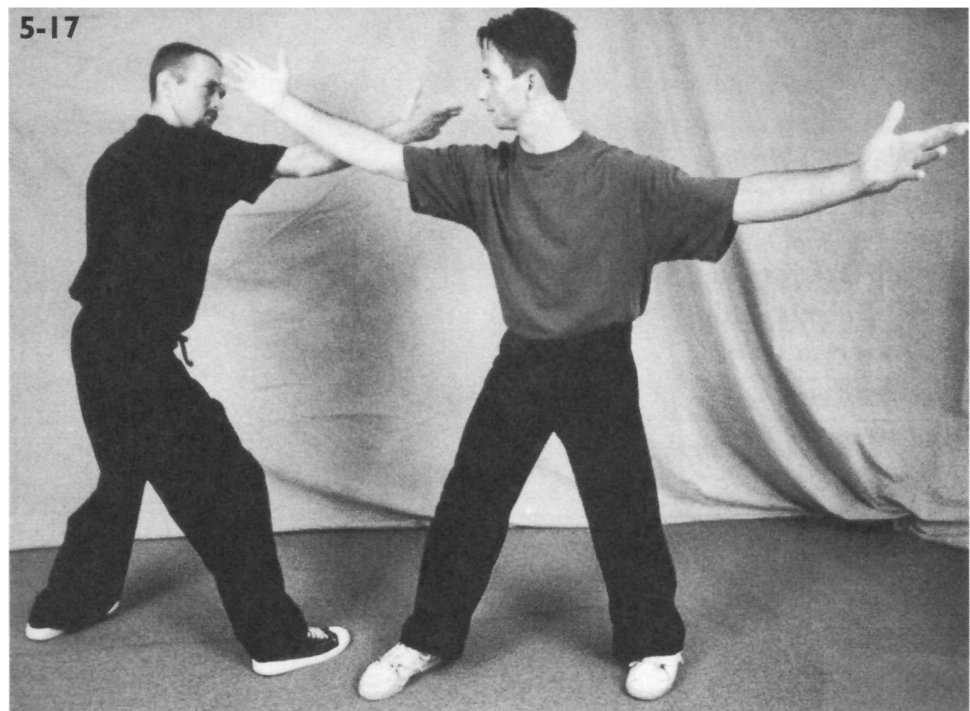
5-15

Attacker Defender



The attack continues. The attacker at left presses the attack again, this time the right hand prepares to attack.

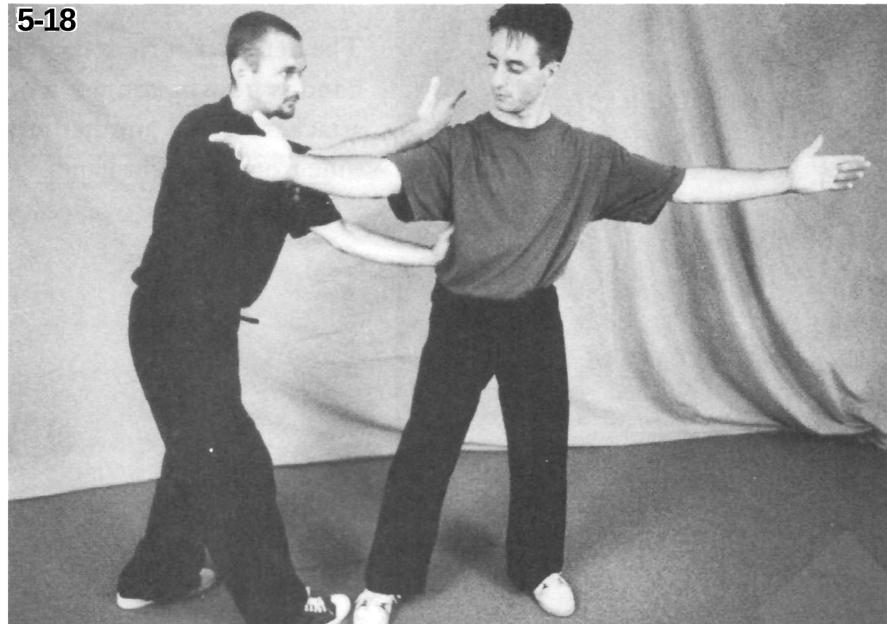
New defense. The defender has already stepped to the rear.

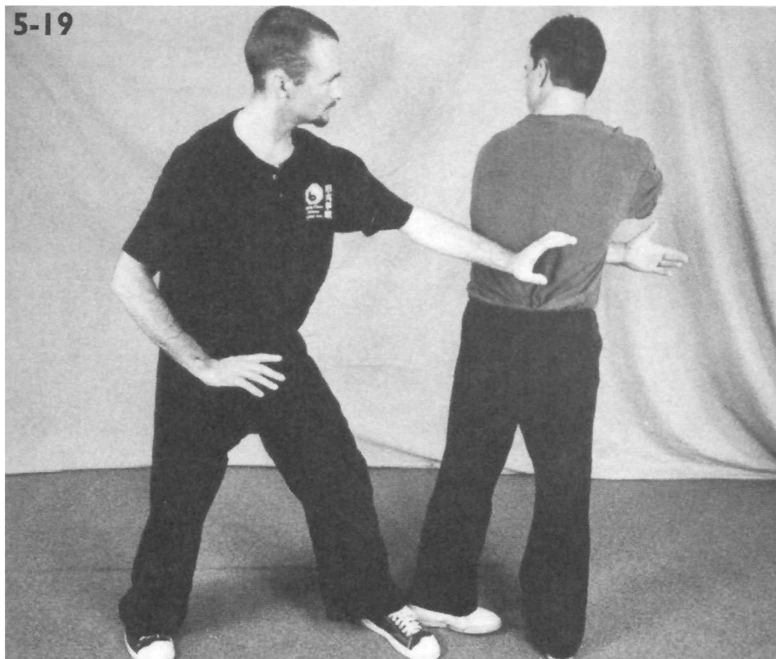


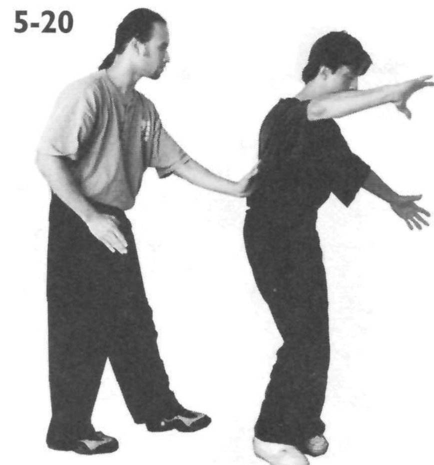
The defense and counter is identical to that used in photo 5-13.

Change of tactics

After the third attack-defense series, the attacker at left changes tactics and initiates a low push attack to the defender's hip or lower back.





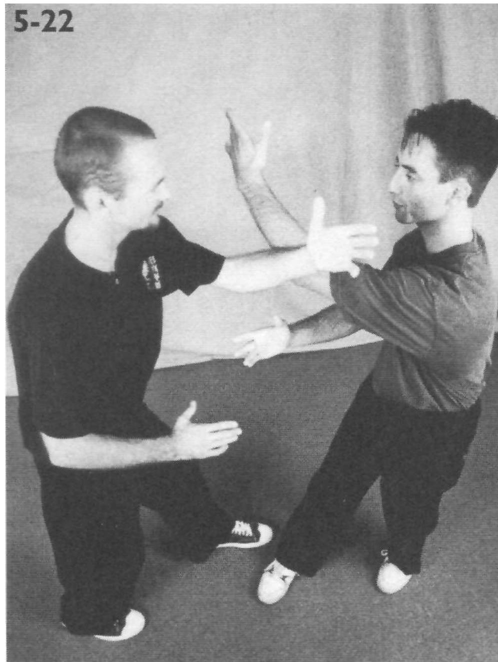




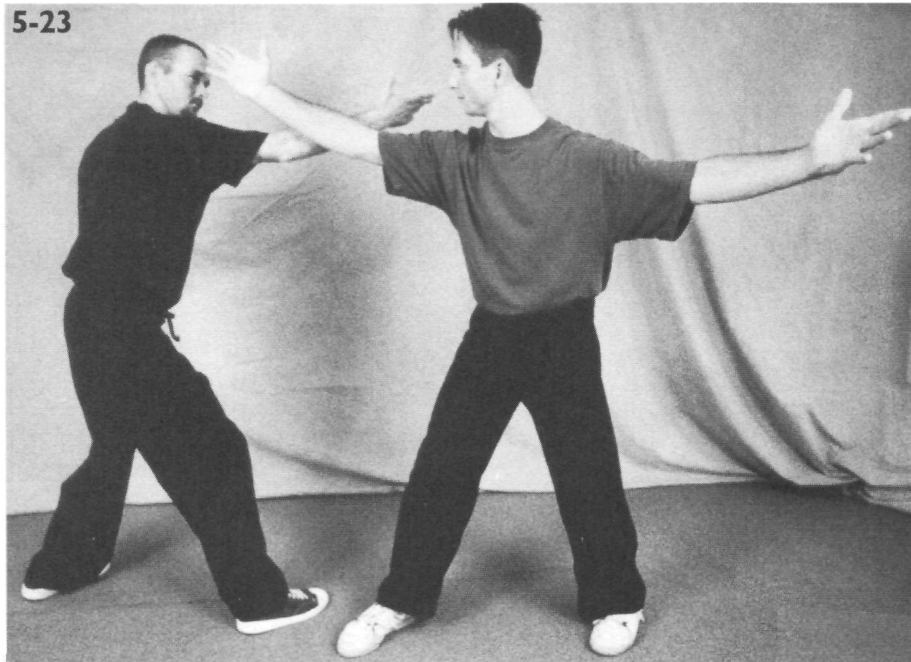
The defender at right turns with the force of the attack into a *ko hu* (close step) position and prepares to turn to the other side.

LESSON

The defender doesn't resist the force of the attack, but instead turns with the force of the midtorso push.



The defender at right completes the turn around, and his left hand is now in contact with the opponent's left arm. The attacker readies another attack to follow the sequence, this time from the right hand.

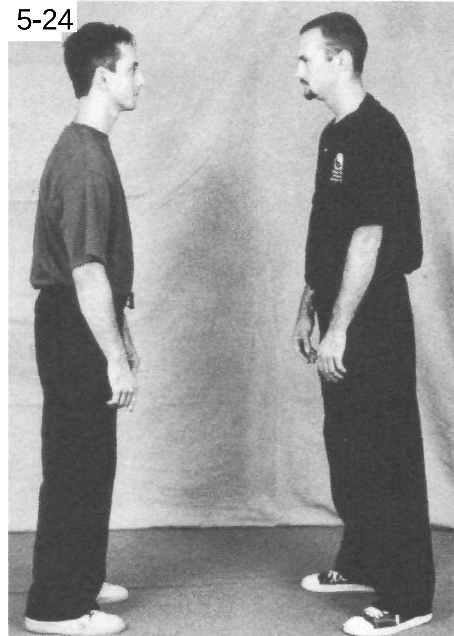


The opponent's new right-hand attack is deflected outward by the defender's right hand. The drill can be repeated again, the terminal position becoming the starting position of the new exercise.

Two-Man Drill Number 3

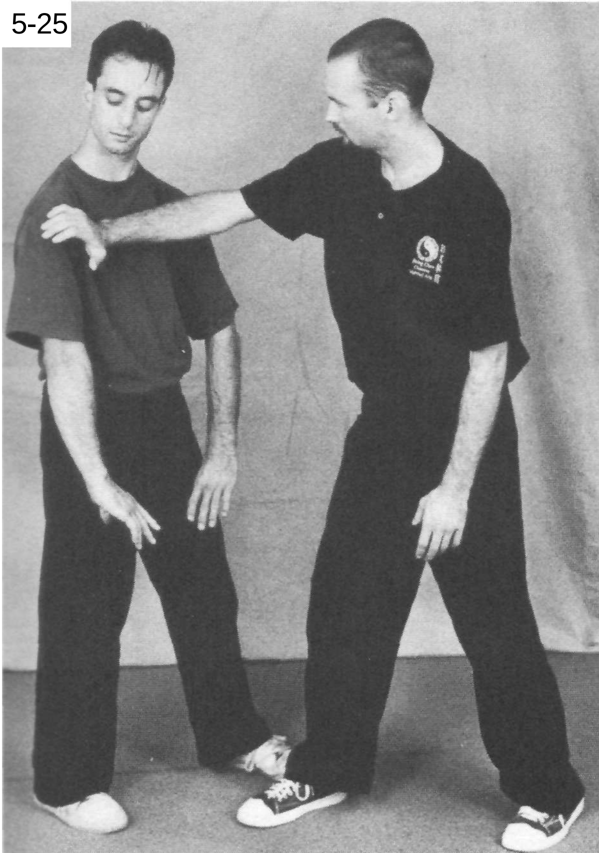
LESSON

Receiving force to your upper body, turning with it, and maintaining a natural rhythm while deflecting and counterattacking.



5-24

The partners face off.



5-25

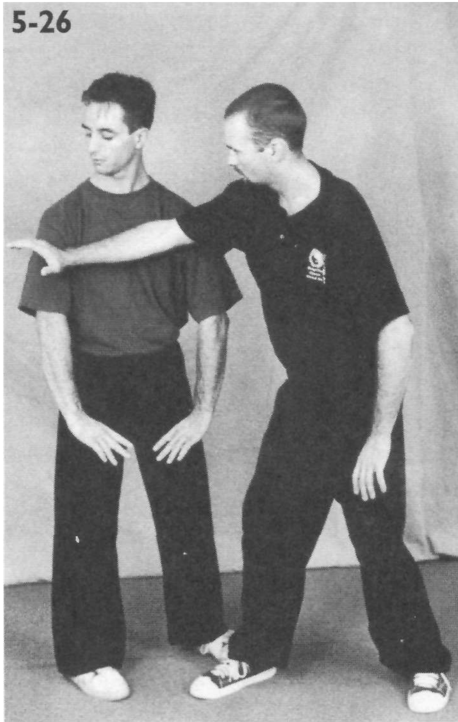
Receive the force, and turn with it without losing your center and root.

In the photo shown here, the defender at left is pushed by the attacker. As his right shoulder is pushed, the defender steps back with the force. Note that the defender's fingers are spread and stretched so as to carry strength and connections throughout the entire body. The body, with unified movements, acts as a revolving door and turns with the force of the attack.

LESSON

Relax the shoulders to train the weight to stay low when under attack.

The defender, at left, turns with die force and the push is deflected past through the use of slight angles and rounding of the body. In Chinese, the term for this body configuration is *bao.*





Overhead view showing slight rounding of shoulders and chest to meet and deflect the on-coming attack.

LESSON

Defend yourself with subtle body position, not with overt force. This skill requires calmness and presence of mind when under attack.

LESSON

Slight contour (rounding) of the upper body allows force to be deflected. The unified, total body, including chest and shoulders, become part of the defensive system.

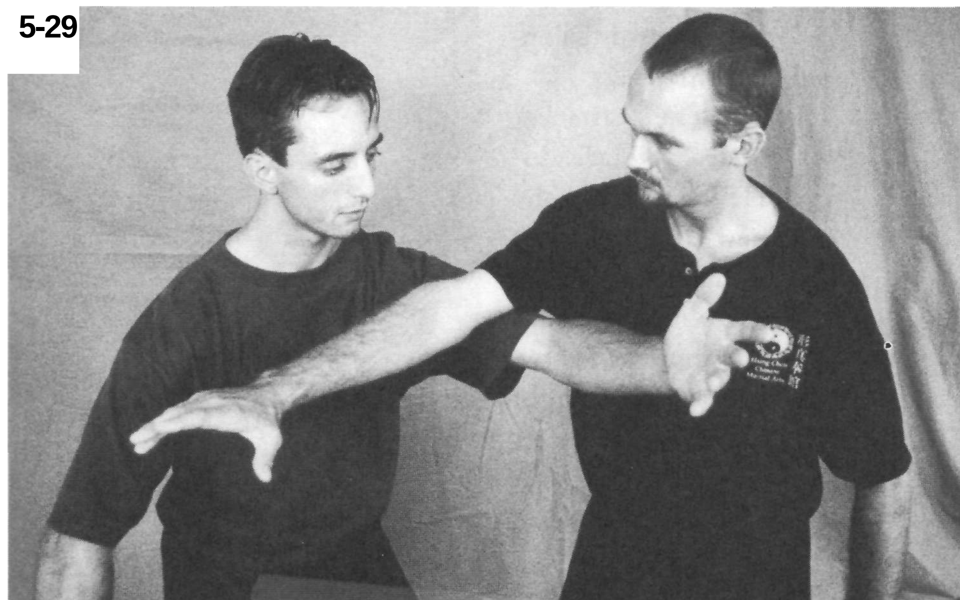
Overhead view showing the defender (at top), preparing to counter-attack.

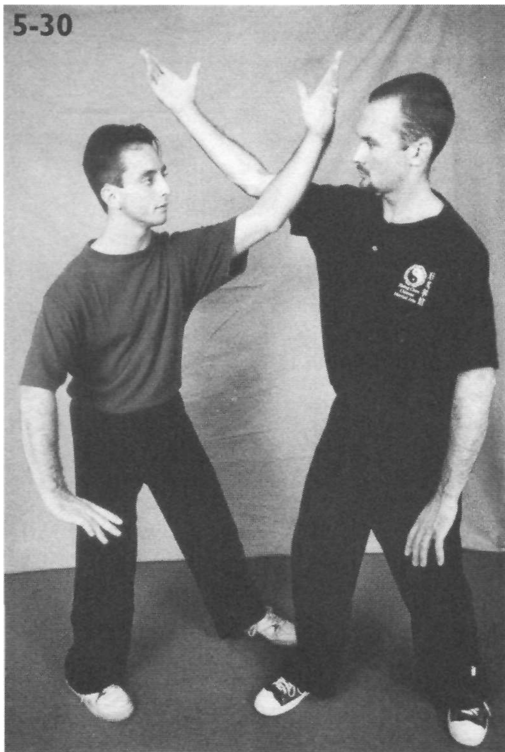
The defender's left arm prepares to rise up and deflect the attack.



5-28

The defender takes the opponent's arm from underneath. Note that outstretched fingers create connective tension through the entire body. This connective tension will be used instead of isolated muscle groups.


5-29

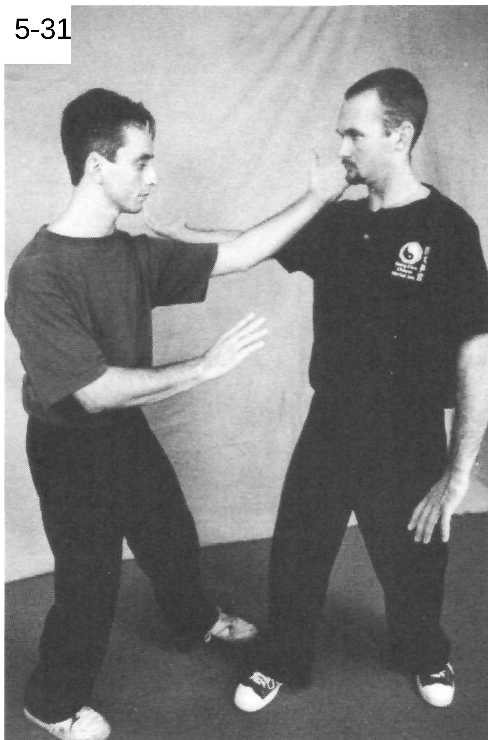

5-30

The opponent's arm is carried to the outside.

NOTE FOR DEFENDER: Avoid getting hit in the head while moving the opponent's arm to the outside by applying advanced subtle principles. Match the outward stretch and force of the opponent's forward attacking arm with the defender using corresponding intercostal (rib cage) expansion. Not *one* point of contact (such as the shoulder or forearm), but the entire body is used to harmonize with and deflect an attack. Subtle adjustments made throughout the system will allow adaptation to variable movements of an attacker.

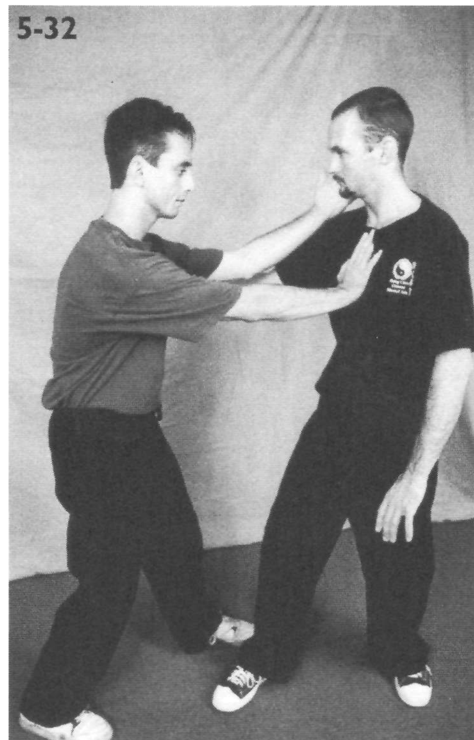
LESSON

Moving the attack to the outside, the motion of which sets up the defender's counterattack.

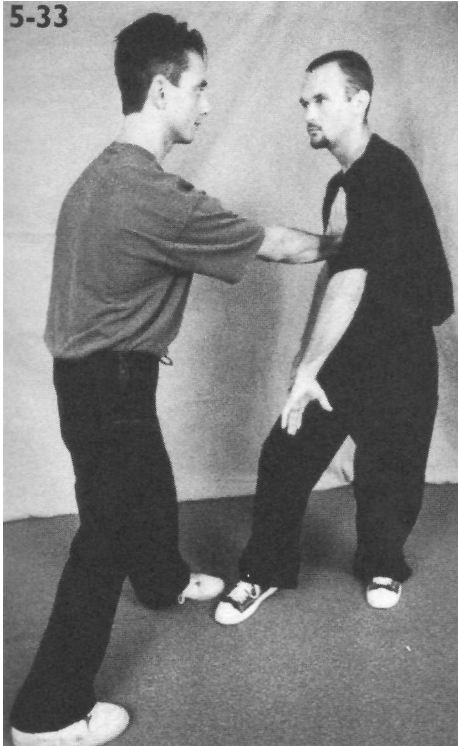

5-31

The defender at left counterattacks with a palm toward the opponent's heart.

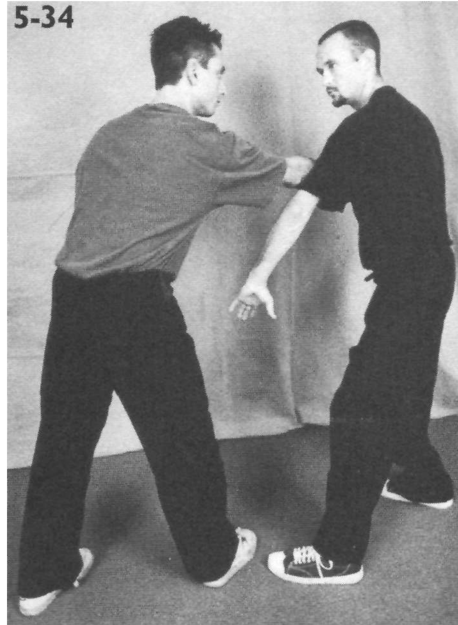
The attacker becomes the defender. He neutralizes the new attack with a slight deflection by rounding his chest. He prepares to step back with his right foot. The attacker will now step through with his right foot.


5-32

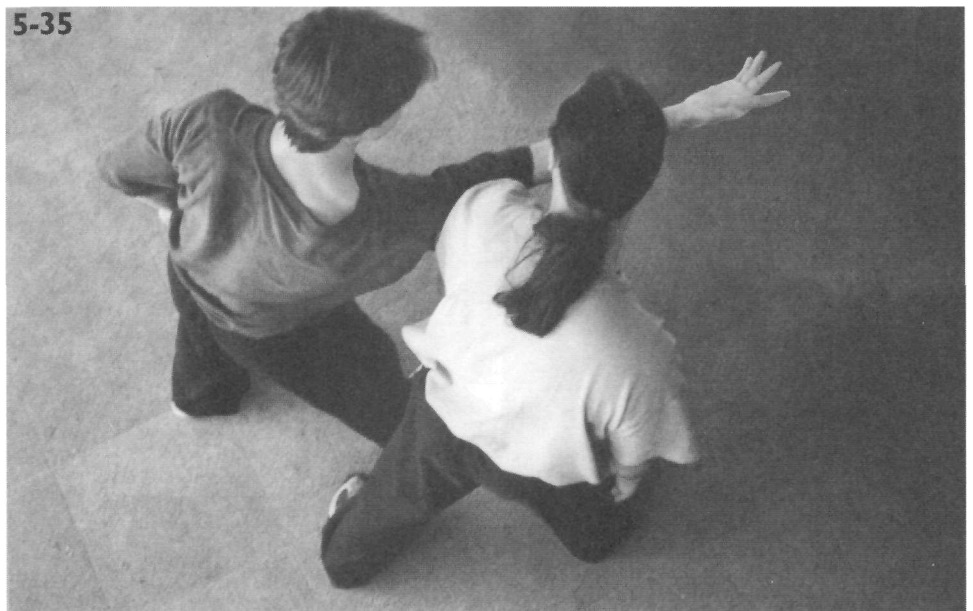
The defender neutralizes the attack by using the same defense as the original defender in photos 5-28 and 5-29.



Rounding of the shoulders assists the neutralization of an attack; (now) defender prepares to step back; (now) attacker will follow through with his right foot.



Notice slightly stretched fingers

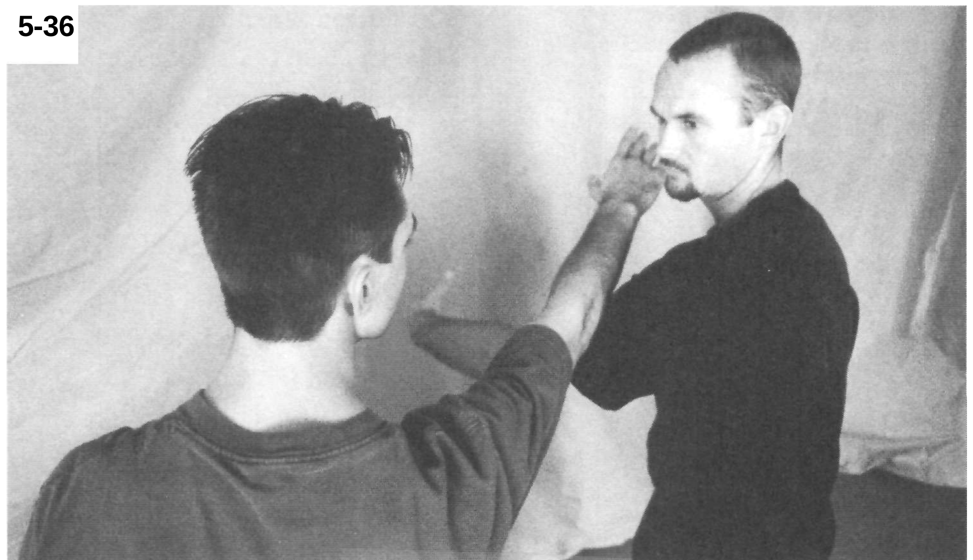


Defender

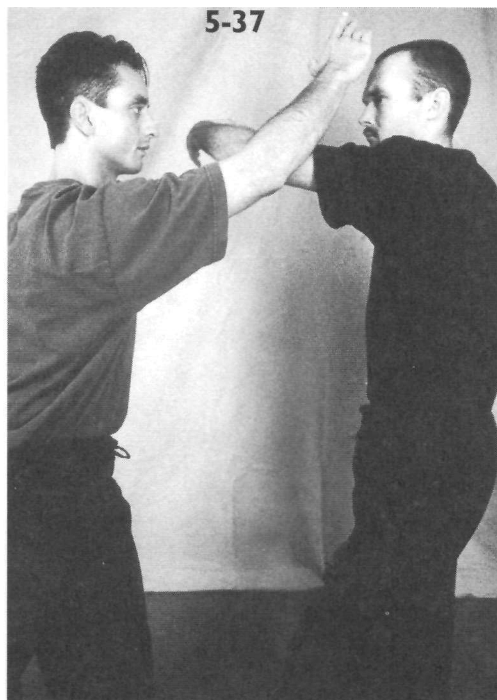
Overhead view

The application of the technique requires the practitioner to maintain close contact with the opponent. Note the use of the shoulder in defense.

Here the (now) defender at right prepares to counterattack as was shown previously in photo 5-29.


5-36

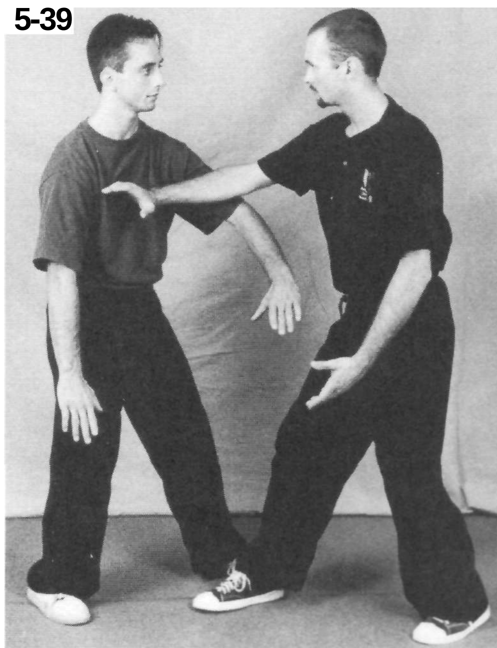
The arm is carried up and out. Photo 5-39 shows the (now) defender delivering a right-hand strike back to the (now) attacker.





New defender New attacker

The attacker, at bottom of photo, counterattacks.

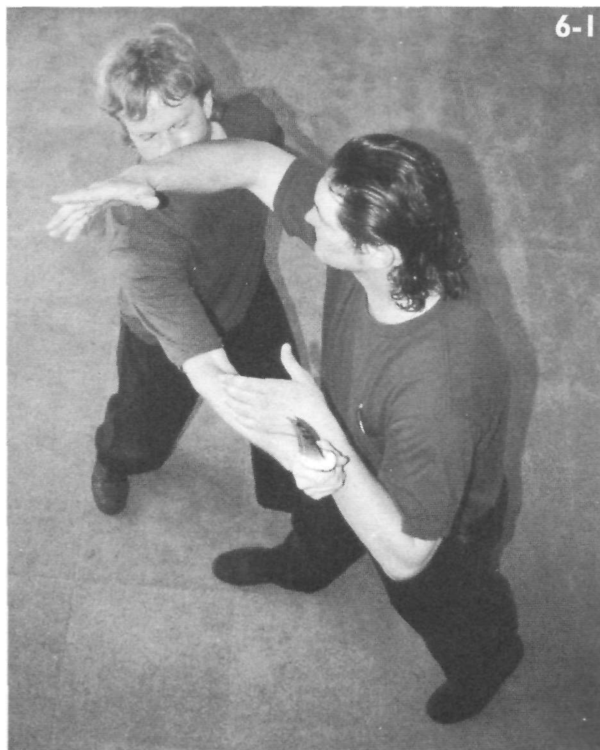


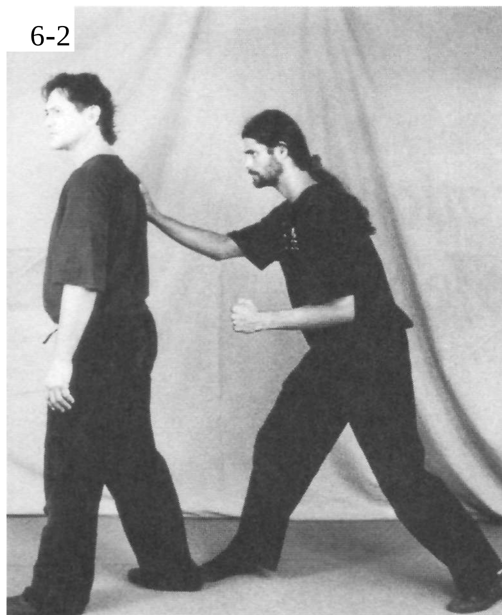
Return to original position: the drill can be repeated.

CHAPTER SIX

8a Gua Applications for Self Defense

Ba Gua Zhang is not an art of techniques or drills, but an art of principles. These principles include "rootedness" while moving, use of circular patterns, and mastery of characteristic steps that enable those proficient in it to master any attack situation. Study of martial art applications prearranged in a sequence can be called a technique but should not be considered a technique that is carved into stone as if it were a type of absolute answer to a specific attack scenario. The value of practicing techniques is the same as same as the practicing of scales in musical instrument training. In the same way that scales develop an adroitness and skill that transcend and are generalized outside of the drills, Ba Gua techniques and partner training patterns develop generalized skills in reaction response, timing, learning to adjust one's position in relation to an attacker's and so forth. Techniques train in the principle and concepts of the art and should not be considered sequences applicable only to a specific self-defense situation.




6-2

Attacker initiates push from rear.

Defense from rear push

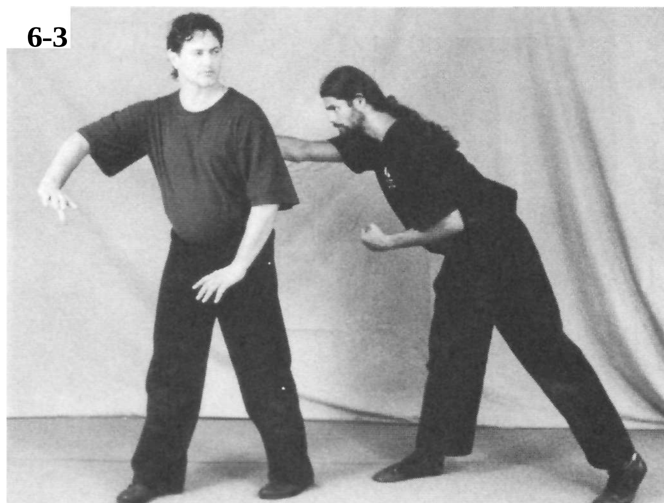
Attack: Right-hand push to right shoulder from rear.

LESSON

In this technique, the defender at left responds to unexpected force on his body. Instead of resisting or being thrown off balance, the Ba Gua stylist moves with the force, turning it back against the attacker.

LESSON

Move and adapt with the force of the push, however, the main lesson is adaptation, not how to defend from a rear push. Train to respond to any surprise force or pressure at any time.

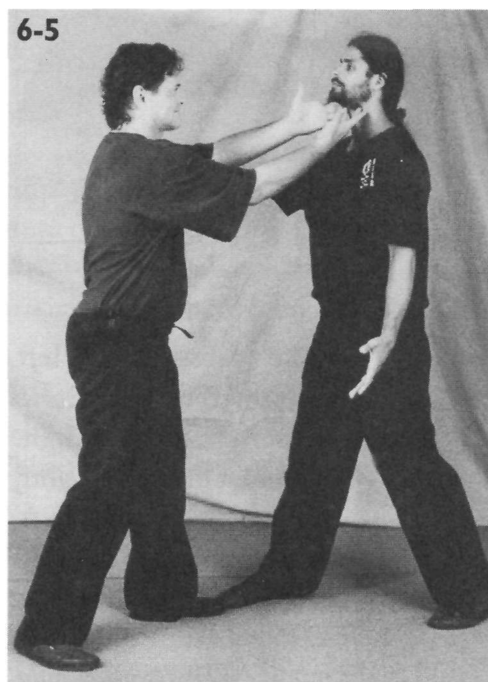

6-3

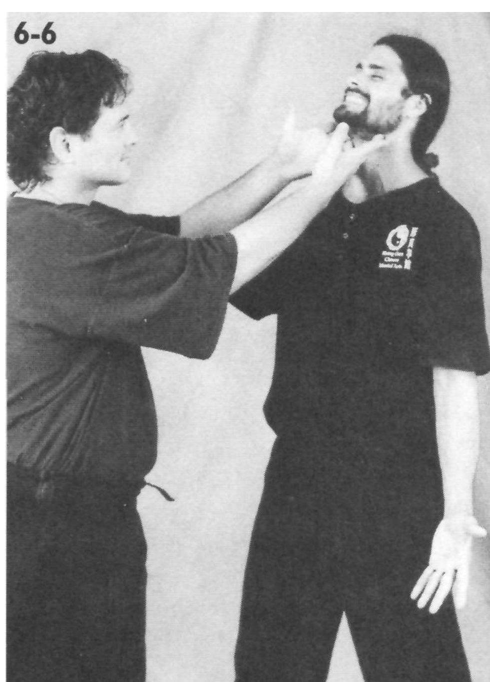
The defender at left steps forward and turns low, changing the force into a curve, rather than being thrown forward by the momentum of the attack.

NOTE: The defender's hands assume a ready position.

Defender in recovery position, as he prepares for counter-attack.



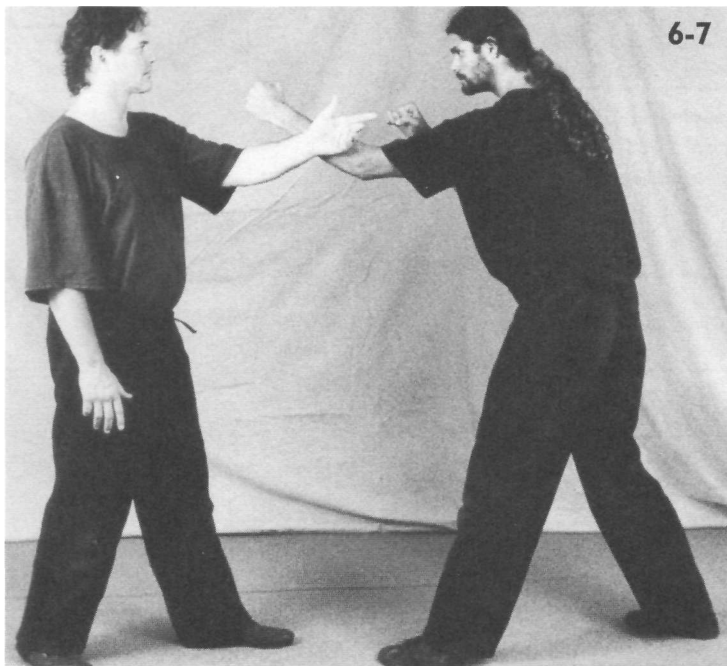




Different views of "monkey offers fruit fingers" strike to neck beneath jaw.

Response to a Boxer's Left Jab

The defender at left keeps his centerline protected against a strong left jab, deflecting it to the left.



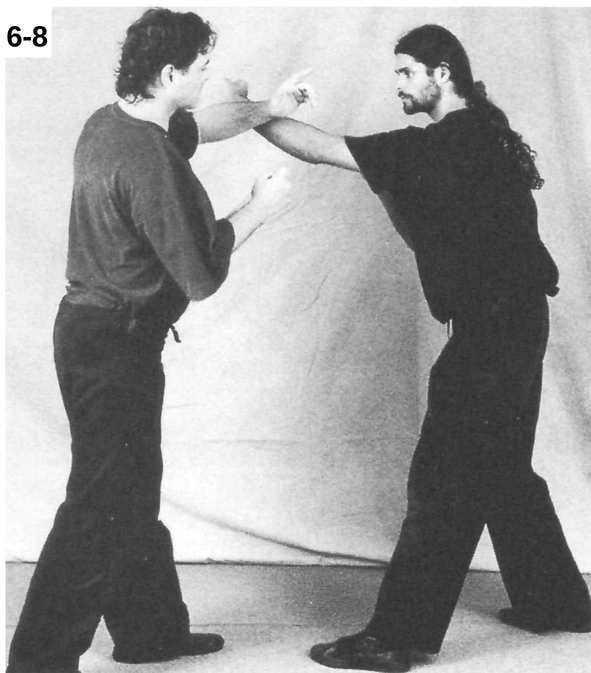
LESSON

Outward deflection using subtle movement.

LESSON

Narrow stance to minimize exposure.

Left elbow slightly inward to protect centerline. Narrow stance minimizes vulnerability.



The defender, at left, "closes the gap" (draws close) advancing with the lead foot first, and slightly to the outside (left/back) of the opponent. While doing this, the defender at the same time prepares a right hand *tswan ch'uan*, (drilling punch).

6-9



6-10



More common in *Xing Yi,* the *tswan* strike is also used in several styles of Ba Gua.[71] In these photos, the defender has moved forward with *shang hu* step, striking with the cross body "drilling fist" to the opponent's jaw.

上步
shang hu

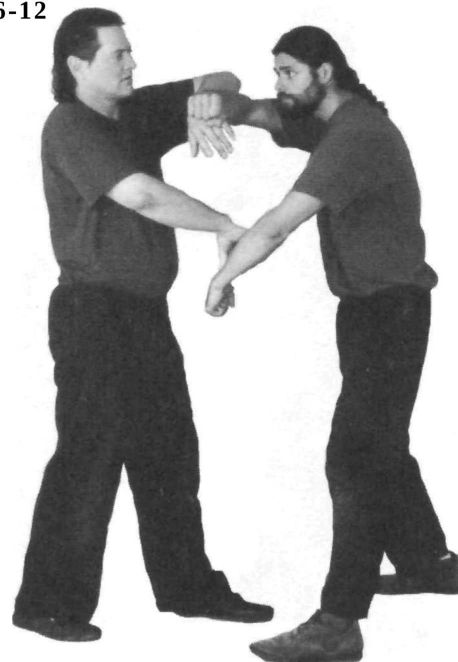
NOTE I: The *shang bu,* or lead advancing step, is found in all the internal martial arts. It closes distance rapidly and is common to *Xing Yi* as well as Ba Gua. This step is especially favored in the internal martial arts since these arts favor powerful, close-range strikes, usually with vertical power traveling up from the "rooted" rear foot.

NOTE 2: When closing with an opponent, it is necessary to limit or eliminate his use of weapons. In this case the "boxer's" lead elbow is checked with enough pressure to limit its use.

6-11



6-12



The boxer "attacker" throws a second attack, a rear right cross. The defender deflects the attack by raising his forearm.

NOTE: Control of opponent's right elbow.

6-13



6-14



6-15



The right foot advances. As shown, the final position could be either "inside" of "outside" or the opponent's stance.

The defender at left steps forward, deep into "enemy territory" checks the attackers arms, and strikes with a down- and outward-slicing forearm called "entering the forest."

Stretched and slightly tensed fingers allow application of entire body's strength.

These photos illustrate Ba Gua practitioner crowding the boxer-attacker by stepping forward into boxer's territory. This is a good example of using "back of the arms" to defend oneself. (See Chapter Four.) Ba Gua defender at left advances into the attacker's center while striking.

At close range, an unprepared opponent is vulnerable to takedowns; one example is shown here.

6-16



6-17



A variation. In case the boxer-attacker steps back with an additional step, by following closely, shown here with the defender using a left foot, this maneuver crowds the attacker while placing him in a vulnerable position to become off-balanced.

Defense from A Rear Leg "Roundhouse" Kick

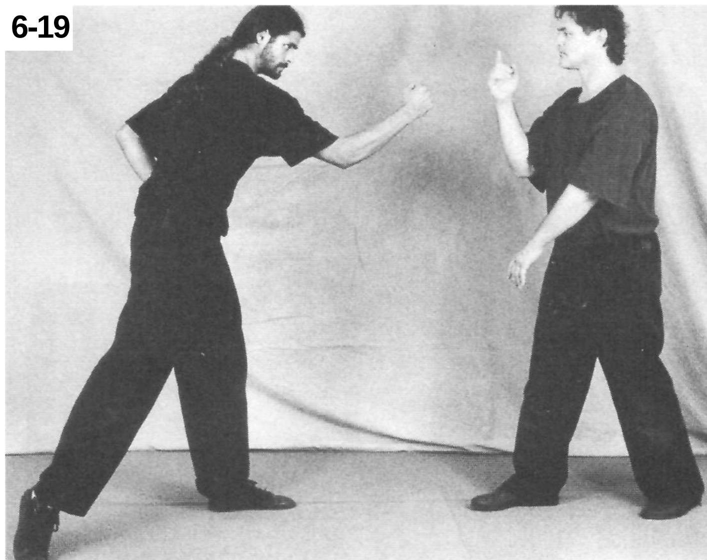
LESSON

Stepping in while neutralizing a leg attack and off balancing the opponent.

6-18



6-19

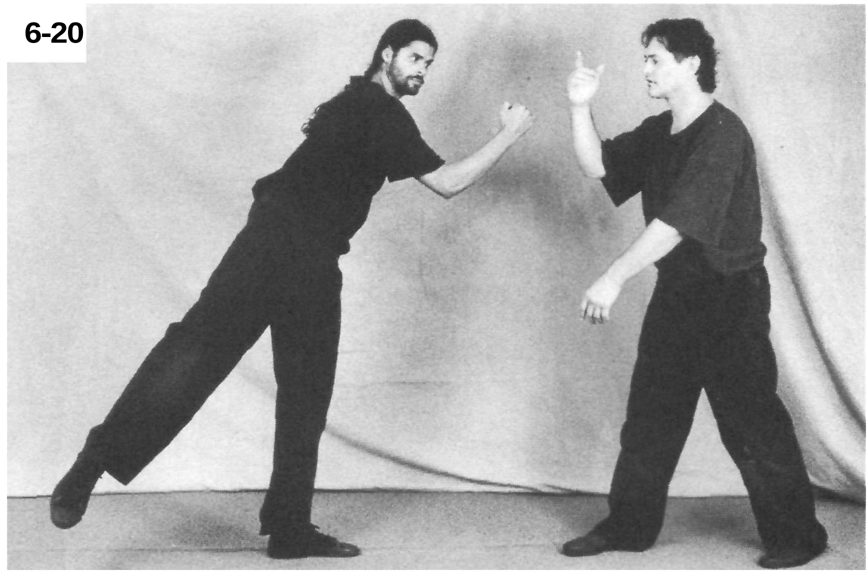


The defender at right observes positioning, weight, and intent of attacker. Body positions of two different attackers are shown. Calmness of mind must be maintained so that the cues that suggest the nature of an impending attack can be noticed. Two styles of set up for the kick-attack are shown in the photos on this page, and some of the cues are exaggerated. A defender who finds himself in this situation has three possible responses: 1) move out of the way; 2) forcefully block the attack; or 3) use skill, technique, placement and timing skills to neutralize and respond to the attack. This defensive technique shown in this section demonstrates an internal stylist's use of the last option.

Attacker at left begins the leg attack. The defender advances forward and prepares to neutralize the attack, advancing into the attacker's position. Correct positioning of the arm and body weight will neutralize the force of the kick.

NOTE: Sufficient training, usually requiring many years of practice, is necessary before a forceful leg attack can be safely neutralized by subtle technique.

6-20



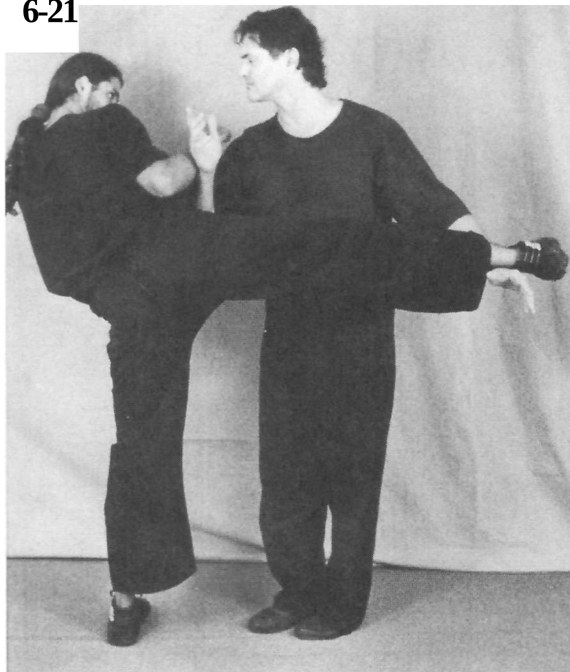
Arm readies to intercept and neutralize the attack. The proper balance of tension is essential. The defense-neutralization cannot be either too loose nor too tense. It must be able to adapt to the angle of the kick attack. Right foot advances at the right moment. As in fencing, the rear foot will "drag-follow."

IMPORTANT:

Subtle techniques against a forceful attack are dangerous if done incorrectly. Be sure to be correctly trained and supervised before attempting this against a strong kick.

This photo shows kick interception and movement forward to off-balance opponent (see next page).

6-21



6-22



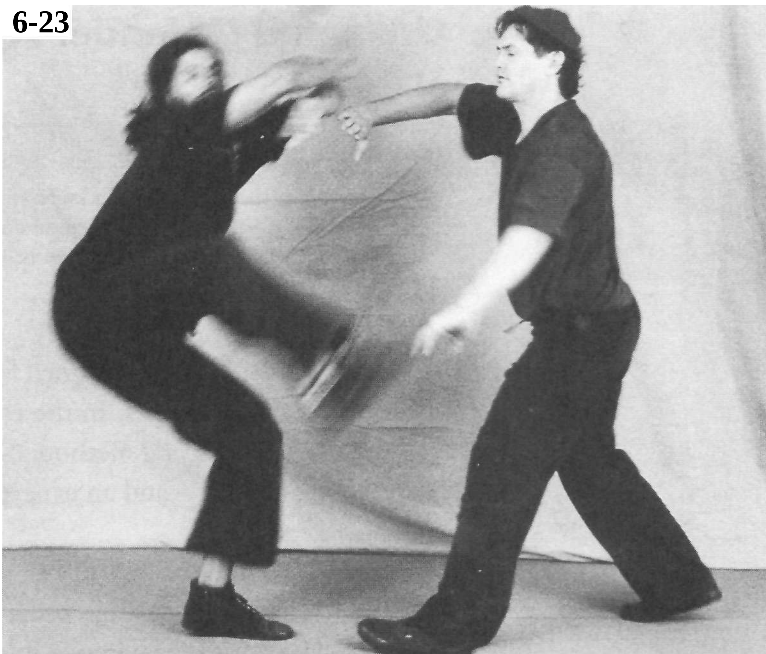
NOTE 1: Every kick has an optimum usage for power and distance. In the example shown here, stepping inside reduces chances of injury from the kick.

NOTE 2: The defender's right hand makes contact with the attacker's forward arm or shoulder, and attacks the opponent's balance.

This photo shows the defender releasing force *(fa jing)* and the opponent being thrown.

LESSON

An important part of internal skill is the ability to issue force *(fa jing).* Internal style power does not develop from the breaking of boards or hand-hardening methods, but instead progresses through various level of subtlety that begin with timing and learning to sense the opponent's weight and intention. In these photos a relaxed defender meets a full-power leg attack. By slight movement, which includes position and timing, the attacker is thrown backward.



6-23

發勁
fajing

Unarmed Defender Against Knife Attack

A right-hand knife attack.[72]

IMPORTANT

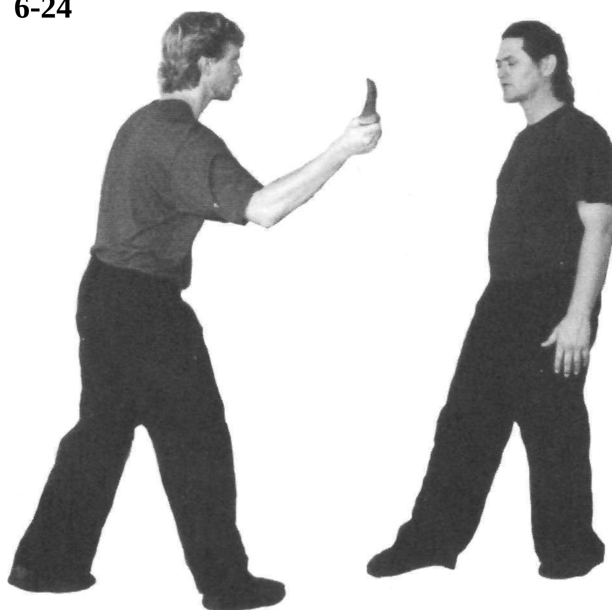
Attempting any defense against a knife-wielding attacker, whether the defender is armed or unarmed, is dangerous. An unarmed defense against a knife-wielding attacker should be used only when there is no escape route available to the defender.

These techniques are designed for advanced martial artists only in the study of principles and concepts. In the case of less-experienced students, this drill may be used as a training method. Never practice using a real knife until after many years of practice and an expert level of skill has been achieved.

Choices when facing a knife attack:

1. Taking an available escape route is the first and best choice.
2. Should such escape be impossible, try to arm yourself with whatever object is available to increase your chances of survival.
3. Psychological preparedness: Keep in mind that there is a real possibility that the defender will be injured despite the relative success of the technique.

6-24



The initial approach or slash

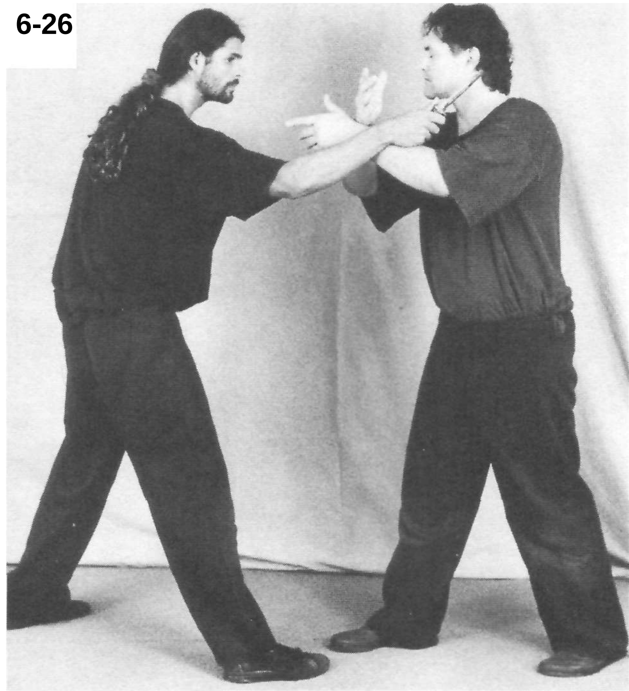
The defender should never keep his weight balanced evenly (commonly referred to in martial art terminology as "50-50."*) The defender keeps his weight back so that he can pivot, adjusting steps easily, until he is able to move in. In the scenario shown in the photo, the defender at right is completely surprised by the slashing attack. Being careful to stay calm, he observes the timing and positioning of the attacker, as the attacker moves toward him with short slashing movements. If possible, the defender times the slashing attacks.

* Although most styles use the evenly balanced, often called the "50-50 stance," preferring a "strong" and "solid" approach to defense, Taoist yogic based internal martial arts approach defense in a different manner, preferring instead to use sensitivity, subtleness and positioning best arrived at from manipulation and control of relative "imbalance."

6-25



6-26



NOTE: The ability to time an attack comes with experience and training. The attacker might slash with jerky movements or over exaggerated flailing movements. To effectively use Ba Gua in this type of situation, the defender must learn to observe subtleties that predict the angle and speed of the attack.
An advancing *shang hu* step (not a step through) is applied. The defender, making his move, closes with the attacker. When the defender moves into this position, he places the backs of his arms and hands toward the blade of the knife. Thus, if he fails to move sufficiently past the danger area of the blade, he risks less serious injury.

NOTE i: The basis for this maneuver is that the defender has no other choice when he applies the defense. He moves forward quickly, exposing only the backs of his arms. Thus, if the knife does cut into the arm, this will result in less serious damage to nerve and blood supply than a slash to the inside. His right hand prepares to strike.

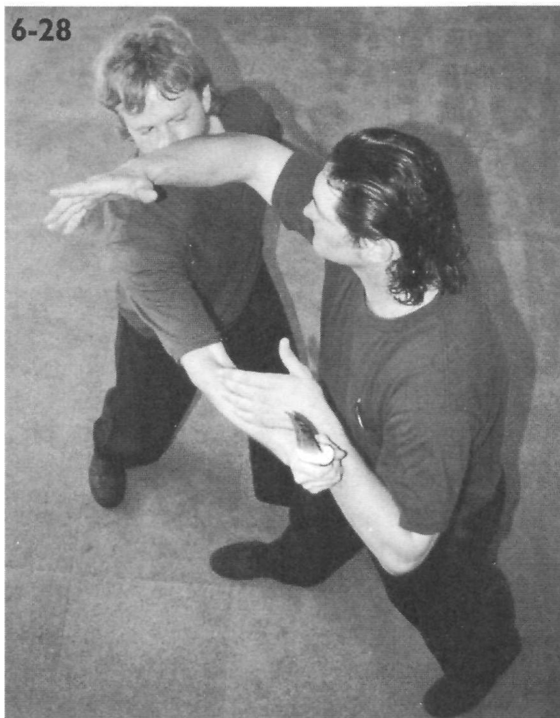
NOTE 2: The defender does not try to grab the knife or knife hand.


6-27

Keeping the weapon checked (not grabbed), defender again moves forward with a lead foot *shang hu* step, striking with open edge of the hand to the opponent's neck or jaw. The right hand is poised to assist, and the defender's body is coiled in a strike preparatory position.

NOTE: The knife is controlled by defender's position, not by grabbing the knife hand.

Here is a close-range variation of the same movements.


6-28

Close range variation: The coiled right forearm strikes forward to attacker's face.

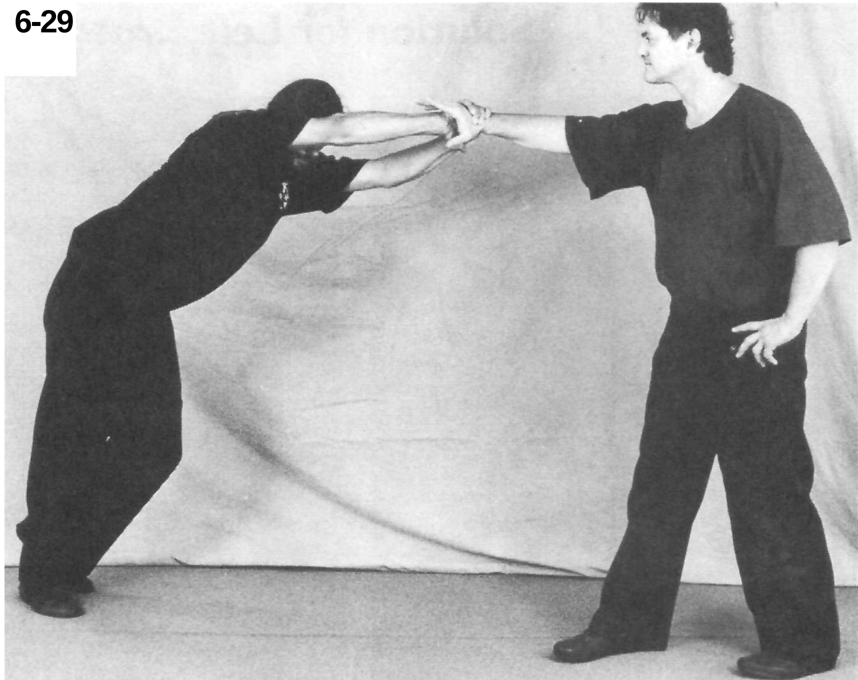
NOTE: As in the previous photo, the defender's outside left arm remains in contact with the attacker's knife-wielding hand.

Advanced Level "tests" for power and alignment of strikes are shown in this photo. "Rooting" and extending power from the rear leg to the edge of the palm or elbow.

IMPORTANT

Force like this *should not* be taken on the body without years of training in the correct principles. *Premature practice of these tests against a forceful push may result in serious injury.* (Because of this danger, I do not allow my students to take such force in the beginning. A lighter pressure is sometimes useful in training.)

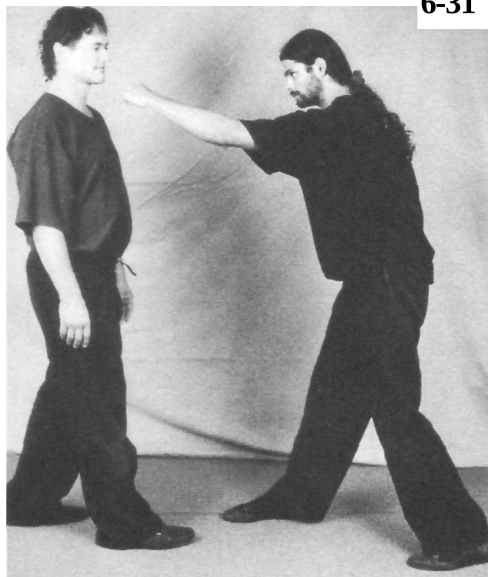
6-29



6-30



Solution for Left Cross Body Hook



LESSON

Ba Gua is an ideal close-range art. However, it does not "stand and fight," instead it attacks by moving in toward the opponent while using advantages of body angles and foot positioning. The technique shown here uses movements that place the defender inside the opponent's area of control. Although both models shown in these photos are tall, in this case the ideal scenario would be a smaller and wiry defender against a larger opponent.

In this first move, the defender intercepts the left hand of the attacker and moves forward, as a right-foot-led *shang bu* advance steps close.

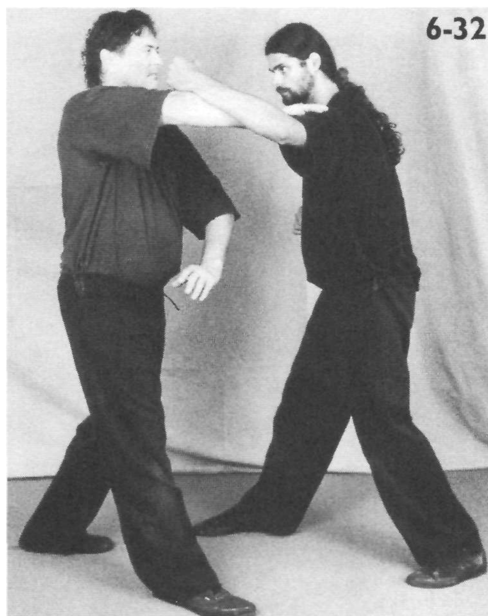
NOTE: Close-range step in defenses are typical of the *Cheng* Style Ba Gua. This school of Ba Gua was developed by Cheng Ting-Hwa, who was skilled in Chinese wrestling. Movements that close with the opponent and have potential of grappling application are common to this style.

Transitional movement

First control, then close-range power is released into the opponent's ribs.

LESSON

Striking with close-range, rooted power while stepping.



"Arcing defense" utilizes the entire forearm. A protective posture, the fingers of the left hand are slightly stretched, the arm ready to deliver a coiled strike.

程庭華
Cheng Ting-Hwa

The defender begins to move beneath attacker's arm while checking the opponent's leg and hip position with his left hand. The shoulder and back are used as contact points to destabilize the attacker.

LESSON

While in movement close to the opponent, keep subtle pressure on his body to maintain control and keep him slightly offbalanced as shown below. The defender uses his entire body from below the neck line to the little finger, without break of contact.

6-33



6-34



6-35



6-36



6-37



6-38



LESSON

Place for control, but do not wrap the thumb around the attacker's hand. A "grab" in the midst of combat is difficult to acquire and restricts movement options.

The defender, now having stepped through with left foot, is behind the attacker. As the defender shifts his weight, he strikes with an elbow to the attacker's ribs. This is a close-range Ba Gua maneuver typical of *cheng* style.

NOTE: The "armbar" is not at the elbow, but one inch above it at the acupuncture point TB 11.

LESSON

Use of pressure point to weaken the joint.

LESSON

Use of counterforce. Use counterforce brought through the entire body, not isolated on the shoulder torque. When this technique is correctly applied, the arm will move down forcefully, but the shoulders remain upright.

6-39



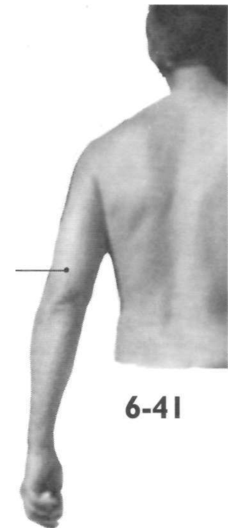
Defender prepares "armbar" takedown.

6-40



Completion of "armbar" takedown.

NOTE: The photo shows the angles offeree and counterforce directed to acupuncture point TB 11.



6-41



Fifth-generation disciples Xu Sheng-Li and Yang Yong-Li practice Ba Gua weapons at the founder's tomb.

In Conclusion



Lineaged disciples meet at Dong Hai-Chuan's tomb.VIP cemetery, Beijing. Author Liu (fourth generation) with fifth-generation disciples Yang Yong-Li (left) and Xu Sheng-Li (right). Author Bracy in center behind Liu.

楊永利
Yang Yong-Li

徐勝利
Xu Sheng-Li

Master Liu Xing-Han, possibly the oldest living master of Ba Gua in the world, represents the last of an era, from a time when old-fashioned artisans first apprenticed, then mastered and finally plied their crafts; a process taking decades, not years. Perhaps people were basically the same then, and it was the austere environment that allowed the arts to develop through a slow-trickling process to mature and solidify over time. When technology was primitive or nonexistent and life was simple, it was easier to learn, practice, research, and master the martial arts. When you had no television to watch, no video games to play, and sometimes not much food to eat, you and your friends always had the martial arts. This is the environment that furthered the progress of the old-school masters.

I know of no young masters who have acquired the voluminous body of knowledge to the extent of Liu Xing-Han. For the most part my generation in the West as well as in China only have pieces. I feel honored to have been able to learn a small *pi-mao* (skin and hair) of the art and I hope my students will share this knowledge with the next generation. Reminiscent of the story told in James Fenimore Cooper's novel, *Last of the Mohicans,* these ambassadors from a previous age represent the last of a tribe. I believe my peers will agree with me when I suggest that if ever you have the opportunity to study with one of the last true masters, do so diligently before their footsteps no longer echo from the earth.

Notes

1. Most Western governments did not recognize the communist government of Mainland China after the revolution and subsequent control of the mainland in 1949. Further isolation occurred during the Cultural Revolution, which lasted from 1967 to 1976.
2. The term Kung fu, also written Gong fu, originally referred to any great skill. "Kung" means work and time, and "fu," "penetrating heaven." The term has become popularized to mean the martial arts of China, correctly called "ch'uan shu'Vboxing arts, or more recently, "wushu'Vmartial arts. Since the term kung fu is understood so broadly as referring to Chinese martial arts, it will be used synonymously with these last two examples.
3. For more information on the life of Dong Hai-Chuan, refer to *Pa Kua: Eight Trigram Boxing* by Robert W. Smith and Allen Pittman, Charles Turtle, Inc., 1989.
4. "Ru men" or "inner door" translates as "one who has passed through the door." In English translating as "discipleship," the term indicates formal acceptance into a traditional kung fu sect or family after an initiation (traditionally via a formal Confucian ceremony). Bracford Tyrey and Marcus Brinkman translate the term as "inner sanctum." See "The Luo-Shu as Taiji boxing's secret inner sanctum training method." *Journal of Asian Martial Arts,* 5, No. 2. pp 74-79.
5. The Kung Fu "family," the original rank system. In use long before belt ranks were ever conceived of, seniority was determined by one's position within the kung fu "group or family." In this hierarchy, the familial relationship (brother, uncle, and so forth) is preceded by "Shr" (teacher). Shr-Fu (Sifu in Cantonese) could be translated as "group/ family" *father,"* Shr-Shung as "group/ family" older *brother"* Shr-Shu as "group/ family" *uncle.*
6. The given lineage name indicates the position in the formal lineage transmission. The preface *Yung* indicates the fifth position. This lineage authentication system was left in the form of a poem by the art's founder,

Dong Hai-Chuan. A lineage name is derived from each respective place in the poem, a word for each generation from first to twentieth. Dong designed the system because of his fear that people from different sects and sub-sects would not be true to his own generation. Each Chinese character in the poem indicates the lineage position of the person holding the given name. Author Liu's given name is Shan Ping. Translated as Peaceful Mountain, this name shows his position as fourth-generation inheritor. The poem in English reads: "Prosperity as wide as the sea. Longevity as enduring as the mountains. A strong art makes firm the foundation of the country and makes glorious, prosperous, and radiant the land. Through morality and virtue, *wu chi* is established." In Chinese, the generational names derived from this poem read: *Hai Fu Shou Shan Yung Qiang I Ting Kuo Chi Ch 'ang Ming Kuang Ta Lu Tao Te Chien Wu Chi.*

7. Decrease in nerve function can ultimately lead to neuropathy. Exercise that enhances blood supply to an area can reverse or prevent this deleterious condition.
8. Tao has been translated, defined as, or compared with the following: divine principle, God's will, Buddha mind, higher self, and similar terms. Taoists, believing that the "true name cannot be named," assumed humility and ignorance with respect to the great divine mystery, and purposefully did not define the term, preferring instead this enigmatic word, translatable as "path."
9. Classically, three levels of internal power are listed: obvious, covert, and mysterious. However, since the latter two fall into energetic definitions, as opposed to physical mechanics, they will be grouped together as different points along a Taoist-yogic energetic continuum.
10. "Horizontal swing" is the throwing of a punch from the shoulder or torquing of the waist, particularly with the rear foot heel off the ground when delivering a strike.
11. The eight extra meridians cross and communicate with standard acupuncture meridians, but are not easily influenced by acupuncture. They are: 1. The governing channel, which runs upward along the spine from the perineum and over the crown. 2. The conception vessel, which runs from the perineum anterior over the center of the chest and ends beneath the lip. 3. The *chong* channel, which runs from the perineum through the abdomen along the kidney channel to the diaphragm. 4.The *dai* (belt) channel, which runs transversely around the waist. 5. *The yang qiao,* which travels up the outside of the leg over the lateral aspects of the mid torso

and terminates at the base of the skull. 6. The *yin qiao,* which starts inside of the leg at the heel, ascends the inside of the leg, and goes across the front of the chest and terminates just lateral to the bridge of the nose. 7. *The yang wei,* which begins at the outside of the heel, runs upward along the outside of the leg, over the lateral aspects of the mid torso and terminates at the base of the skull. 8. *Yin wei,* which starts at inside of the shin, goes up the inside of the leg through the inguinal groove, and crosses the chest and terminates above the adam's apple.

12. Although widely used by Sinologists, the broader translation of "applied" compared to "religious" Taoism may be more appropriate when speaking about the development of arts and sciences. The characters *taojiao* literally mean Taoistic teachings.
13. Outer alchemists used furnaces and various types of early laboratory equipment to produce the elixir.
14. A high percentage of Newton's existing work in his own handwriting is on the subject of alchemy. European alchemy sought transmutation of base metals into gold. An interesting parallel with Chinese alchemy is that both styles used language that included the spiritual as part of the alchemical process. The Western alchemists couched their writings in spiritual terms, and some people now believe that their practices were designed to be an allegory to spiritual development.
15. *Tien Yuan Fu Yao Ching,* quoted by Needham, Joseph, in *Science and Civilization in China,* Vol. 5, p. 66.
16. Outer and inner schools, blending traditions, were not separate until later.
17. Cibot, *Notice du Cong Fu de Les Chinois des Bonzes Tao-see. Memoires concernant L'Histoire, Les Sciences Les Arts De Chinois Par Les Missionaires De Pekin.* 1778-1779.
18. Smith, Robert, *Chinese Boxing, Masters and Methods.*
19. Smith, Robert, *Hsing I and Mind.*
20. A discussion about Ching and sexuality by the famous Cheng Man-Ching is recorded by R. Lowenthal in *There Are No Secrets: Professor Cheng Man-ChingandHis Tai Chi Chuan,* North Atlantic Books, 1991, pp. 101-105.
21. *Yuan Chhi Lun,* author unknown, quoted from Needham, Joseph, *Science and Civilization in China,* vol 5. Cambridge University Press, 1983.
22. Ko Hung, *Pao Pu Tzu.* This portion using translation from Needham, Joseph, p. 211.
23. Wong and Wu, *The History of Chinese Medicine,* Shanghai Quantine Service, 1936: 72-73.

24. Huang Tsung-Hsi, *Nei Chia Ch'uan Fa.* From reference cited by Wile, Douglas, *Lost T'ai Chi Classics from the Late Ching Dynasty.* Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996, p. xvi.
25. There is the popular belief about Chang San-Feng as the supposed creator of several internal styles, particularly tai chi. He is said to have existed in the twelfth, thirteenth, or fourteenth century; however, there is essentially no scholarly support that he even existed, much less that he created an internal style martial art.
26. Ch'ang Nai-Chou Ch'ang-Shih Wu Chi, edited by Hsu Chen, from references cited by Wile, Douglas, p. 9.
27. Wile, P. pp. 49-51.
28. Naquin, Susan. *Shantung Rebellion: The WangLun Uprising of '1774.* Yale University Press, New Haven, 1981.
29. Watson, Buton. *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu,* p. 340.
30. Wiles p. 24.
31. Robert W. Smith, *Hsing I: Chinese Mind-Body Boxing.* Kodansha Intl., Tokyo, 1974, p. 111.
32. Wile, p. 27.
33. Yang Cheng-Fu, grandson of the founder of the Yang Style. Story about the episode in his life quoted from *Grandmasters,* China Direct Publishing, Spring 1991, p. 23.
34. Fish, Ken, "Defining 'Internal' Kung Fu," *Pa Kua Chang Journal,* vol #2, No. 2 and No. 3. Highview Publications, "Jan/Feb 1992 & March/April 1992." In the article, "Internal Boxing and Taoist Alchemy," several issues later, author Bracy argued that the Internal martial arts referred to a specific internal training tradition. See *Pa Kua Journal*, vol. 3 No. 6, Sept/Oct 1993.
35. Robert Becker, M.D., *The Body Electric,* William Morrow & Company, Inc., New York, NY: 1985, pp. 235-236.
36. Eisenberg, David, M.D., *Encounters with Qi: Exploring Chinese Medicine*, The Penguin Group, 1985.
37. *The Mystery of Chi,* PBS: Bill Moyer's "Healing and the Mind," 1993.
38. *Pa Kua Chang Journal,* Jan/Feb 1992, Vol. 2, #2. According to Huang Chin-Shen if one did not know about Wang being a I-Kuan Taoist "then chances are that he did not know much about the 'inner teachings' reserved for selected students."
39. Smith, Robert, *Chinese Boxing: Masters and Methods*, p. 67.
40. Although there are several ways to explain their reactions, I have found criticism of these examples by some colleagues when I cite this story as

meaning something significant. Although special skills, such as the ability to draw a mark on one's body without physical contact would be a foolish goal of twenty or more years of practice, legitimate demonstrations such as described provide the basis from which to develop models to replicate and test an internal energy hypothesis.

41. Eisenberg, David, M.D., *Energy Medicine in China: Defining a Research Strategy which Embraces the Criticism of Skeptical Colleagues*, from a talk presented at the Fetzer Foundation Conference: "Energy Fields, Meridians, Chi and Device Technology," May 11-14; Noetic Sciences Review, Spring 1990.
42. Now famous as the master who throws students around without much contact on the previously mentioned PBS production, *The Mystery of Chi.*
43. Where moving the *qi* via massage became known as *an mo,* inwardly directing the flow of *qi* was known as *Tao Yin* (literally "guiding the energy").
44. Wile, p. 60. Parallel development in T'ai Chi. Ch'en Hsin wrote *Chen Style Tat Chi Ch'uan* between 1908 and 1919. Douglas Wile has made an extensive examination of the historicity of the Yang style. In discussing the Chen literature he calls it "the only work comparable in the scope and detail of its medical, metaphysical, and meditational content." An extensive discussion on the possible nexus that produced the t'ai chi "Forty Chapter" mix of martial arts, medicine and meditation is included in his work. See page 60, Wile, Douglas. *Lost Classics from the Ching Dynasty,* University of New York Press, Albany, NY, 1996.
45. *Tao Te Ching,* Chapter 50.
46. Watson, Burton (translator) *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, Chapter 6, page 78-79.
47. T'ai Chi and Xing Yi had developed as martial arts before application of Taoist physical principles and yogas merged with martial arts. However many teachers of these arts, especially in Beijing and surrounding major cities, incorporated Taoist "internal" principles, especially after publication of books on the subject by Sun Lu-Tang.
48. Blofeld, John, *The Secret and Sublime: Taoist Mysteries and Magic.* E. P. Dutton & Co., New York, NY, 1973, p. 125
49. Note that some martial art researchers believe that the martial art of Ba Gua has nothing to do with the / *Ching* at all, other than a shared name, perhaps selected as a lucky omen.
50. The term *sung,* often translated as "softness," has no exact equivalent in English. It refers to "springiness" or "tenacity." See Bracy, John, "Ba Gua

Mechanics" *Pa Kua Chang Journal,* Sept/Oct 1996, High "View Publications.

51. *Te* has been translated as "power." This character, although often translated as "virtue" applies to a Universal power. It appears in the title of the Tao Te Ching; thus the text is often translated as the "Classic of the Tao and its Power." R. L. Wing translates the text as the "The Tao of Power." According to Wing:

    "The early Chinese regarded the planting of seeds as *te,* and *te* came to mean stored energy or potentiality, and sometimes magic power. Not until the widespread popularity of Confucian ideas a century later, did *te* begin to take on the meaning of social imposed moral conduct. This was eventually translated into English as 'virtue.'"

    See R. L. Wing, *Tao of Power,* p. 9, Doubleday/Dolphin, 1986.
52. Csikszentmihalyi, Mihalyi; *Beyond Freedom and Anxiety,* p. 81.
53. Watson, p. 50.
54. Ibid.
55. Herrigel, Eugene, *Zen in the Art of Archery,* Translated by R.EC. Hall, Vintage Books, New York, 1971, pp. 41-42.
56. Wilhelm/Baynes, *The I Ching or Book of Changes,* p. 83.
57. "Telegraph" is defined as subtle tension and cocking of an arm or leg before a strike is launched. It is telegraphing because its preparation is noticeable.
58. *Wai San He,* a Taoist yogic physical and alchemical principle, involves physical correspondences in the body, namely the relationships between the wrist and ankle, the elbow and knee, and the shoulder and hip.
59. "Don't use force to conquer the universe, use of force is followed by loss of strength. This is not the way of nature. That which goes against the way of nature will not last long." *Tao Te Ching,* translated by Gia-Fu Feng and Jane English, Chapter 30.
60. Why do surfers make better martial artists? Over the last twenty years of operating a martial arts school on the Southern California coast I have observed that many internal martial arts students who excelled in combat applications were surfers. As far as internal martial arts go, the surfers' physique and training embody the ideal: wiriness, achieving connection, coiling and rooting while in motion. This training is no doubt a crossover skill of their surfing sport which requires balance and rootedness to a narrow piece of fiberglass being tossed about by a wave, where fear, and resulting tension, immediately brings defeat.

61. David Holly, *Filling a Void with "Qigong" in China* Los Angeles Times, October 16, 1997, H8.
62. Belief plays an important role in healing. Placebo studies show that about a third of the time people get better just because they believe in the pill or therapy.
63. Chien Han Shu PPT/NP, quoted from Needham, Joseph. *Science and Civilization in China,* vol. 5.
64. Ware, James (translator), *The Nei Pien ofKo Hung (Pao-p'u tzzu),* p. 122.
65. This portion following translation from Needham, Joseph, *Science and Civilization in China,* ch. 33, v. 5, p. 210.
66. Waley, Arthur (translator), From quote in *Pao P'u Tzu,* in *The Way and its Power,* Grove Press, New York, 1958, p. 122.
67. Smith, Robert, *Pa Kua: Eight Trigram Boxing,* p. 12.
68. Width of circle. Size ranges depending on purpose. In general, a smaller circle is more difficult to work since the body's angles must change and conform to more challenging curve relationships of the circle. In the *qi gong* exercise shown here, Master Liu demonstrates the exercise on an (approximately) 8 foot diameter circle.
69. *Author's note:* When I was first taught this term, it was difficult to get verification or insight into the meaning of the term "walking the horse." Even though I had the characters written down in my notebook, it wasn't until recently that I was able to validate and gain insight into the meaning. The insight did not come from a Ba Gua master, but from one of my California students who had experience handling horses. To him these exercises, part of which involved leaning your back against an opponent, immediately made sense. It appears that every equestrian knows that if a horse isn't being cooperative, and doesn't want to move, push him as hard as you like and the animal will only resist. However, common to horse trainers is the principle of resting your back on the side of the animal and applying lateral pressure from your weight. With this method the animal can be moved easily. Thus, the concept must have come from those familiar with horses, a standard means of vehicular movement in turn of the century China. The principle works well for close quarter combat, where you may suddenly find the necessity of moving and controlling an opponent with your back in contact with the adversary, particularly in crowded, multiple opponent situations.
70. Intercostal vs. trapezius. Instead of isolated muscle groups (ie. pivoting from waist, torquing and throwing the shoulder) internal arts instead rely

on total body unity, where subtle extension of the entire body is essential. Hence intercostal expansion replaces trapezius (upper shoulder) rising.

71. *Tswan* or "drilling" has also been called the "Canton corkscrew." See Gilby,John, *Secret Fighting Arts of the World,* p. 63.

72. Special thanks to Dr. Vince Black for his suggestions and sharing his real-life research findings in this area.

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About the Authors



Liu Xing-Han

Liu Xing-Han, of Beijing, China, at eighty-nine years may be the oldest living master of the art of Ba Gua. Last of the fourth-generation Ba Gua disciples, he began his martial art study in 1917.

In 1996 he was the subject of a China National Television documentary commemorating his life's work, and has been written about in Chinese magazines, martial art journals, and newspapers. In the United States several issues of *Pa Kua Journal,* including its debut edition covered his work. He is the author of three books on Ba Gua in China.

He continues to teach the internal tradition. In the early morning dedicated students from all over China come to study with the master at Temple of Heaven Park in south central Beijing.



John Bracy

John Bracy became a fifth-generation lineaged disciple of Ba Gua Zhang in 1988. He founded the Hsing Chen School of Internal Martial Arts in Costa Mesa, California in 1976 and has continued as director since it incorporated in 1990. He has studied at advanced levels in the United States, Taiwan, and mainland China and has attained advanced rankings and honors in several styles of traditional kung fu. His credentials include Licensed Instructor and Counselor rank and eighth-degree instructor level from the Taiwan Pa Kua Gate Association. Additionally, he is a licensed coach of the Beijing Full Contact Fighting Association.

As a graduate exchange student in Taiwan, he researched psychotherapeutic applications of acupuncture. He writes widely on Ba Gua and Taoist alchemy, and he teaches Ba Gua, Xing Yi, and T'ai Chi, as well as Taoist healing exercises and meditation in Costa Mesa, California.

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